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ALTINA
the Sword Princess
Yukiya Murasaki
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ファミ通文庫

覇剣の皇姫
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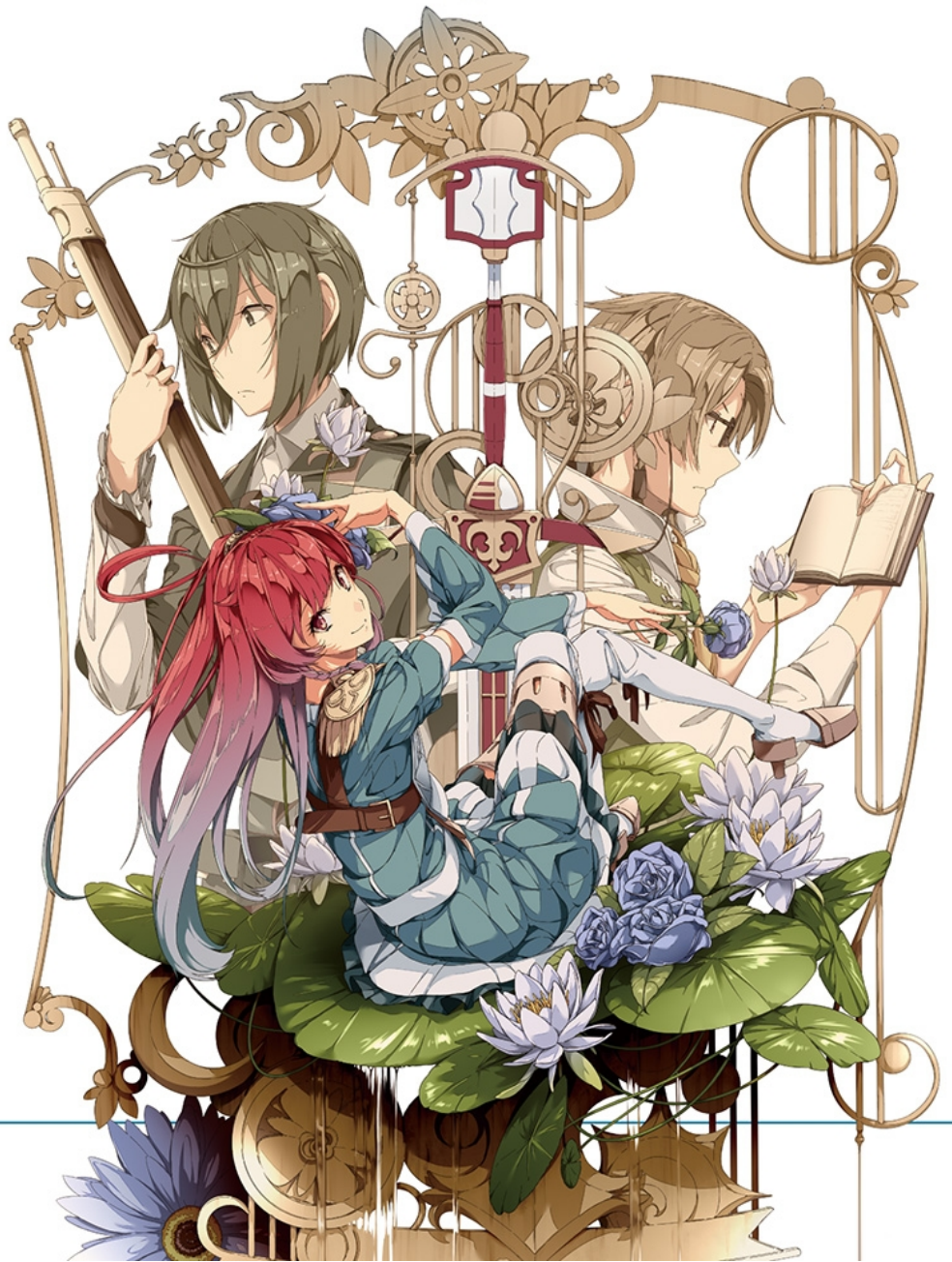
ALTINA
the Sword Princess



「雑兵どもがッ!!」
ベルガリア帝国軍三等武官
ヴァレイズ
製鉄街に住む少女
フェル

「うっ……」
「貴女！　いくらレジス様付きのメイドとはいえ、主の許可なしに私室に入るものではなくてよ？」
傭兵団《吊られた狐》射手
フランツィスカ
傭兵団《吊られた狐》占星術師
イェシカ
ティラソラヴェルデ公爵家次女
ファンリィーヌ

「総督、左翼をもっと後ろまで退かせてください」
ベルガリア帝国軍総督
ラトレイユ
「よかろう、レジス殿の用兵を見せてもらうとしよう」
読書狂の軍師
レジス

ALTINA
the Sword Princess

Prologue - Situational Report

Imperial year 851 July 21st—

The sun rose from behind the mountains in the east.

Regis left his tent and came here before dawn.

Even though there was a dense forest on the slope of the hills, barren ground could be seen as they had harvested plenty of trees.

There were many soldiers working here.

This wasn’t a battle.

They dug the grounds single-mindedly with shovels.

The leader of the pioneers saluted as he saw Regis.

“Thank you for your hard work, Strategist Auric Sir!”

“… Ah, thank you.”

Even though Regis' current position should be 'Deputy Chief Strategist', he would forgo the trivial details.

Right now, he was seconded to the First Army.

He was invited by the Field Marshall Latreille himself— This news was already widespread.

The soldiers around him all looked his way.

"... That is the legendary 'Wizard'?"

"I heard he won all his battles against High Britannia so far."

"He seemed to have captured Fort Volks which had remained impregnable for 40 years with just 2,000 men."

"But he lost yesterday."

"Hey, if he hears that..."

The soldiers whispered amongst themselves.

Yesterday—

The Imperial Army used siege weapons in their assault of the

steel production street side of Grebauvar fortress city.

But the plan failed.

It was effective as a feint attack, but from the results, it was indisputable that many soldiers died in battle.

Regis’ rank was low, but he still held the position of a staff officer, and the troops weren’t dumb enough to criticize him right in his presence.

He had not fallen to the point of losing their trust, but he wouldn’t be so sure of that if he lost again.

Regis scratched his head.

The rumors running rampant among the troops — that Regis took part in this campaign on Latreille’s request — weren’t wrong.

But part of the reason was hidden.

*

Regarding the Third Grade Admin Officer promotion examination.

He recalled what happened before the First Army set off, when he went off to see Minister Beylard at the Ministry of Military Affairs.

Back then, Latreille stopped Regis who was on his way there to explain himself and said he wanted to tag along

It was inside the palace, so they didn’t walk far.

But the problem was his goal.

Field Marshall Latreille who commands the entire Imperial military was spending time on Regis, who was merely a 5th grade admin officer. This was abnormal.

—— *Is this really okay?* Even though Regis thought that, he didn’t have the authority to question Latreille.

He followed behind Latreille and headed towards the Ministry of Military Affairs.

Inside Beylard’s office.

As Latreille came without notice, the Minister thought something important happened and stood up hastily with a

salute.

“F-Field Marshall Sir… What is the matter!? If there is anything I can do for you, you just need to summon me over…”

Latreille nodded regally.

“Alright, I will make it simple. It is regarding the promotion exams.”

Yes Sir! May I ask what is the issue!?”

“For Regis d’Auric’s promotion exam, I want him to fight in an actual battle in lieu of the exam.”

“… Re… Regis?”

Only now did the minister notice Regis who was standing behind Latreille. He then pointed at Regis and shouted without a second thought.

“It’s you!?”

After his outburst, the minister realized something and spoke again.

“Ah, no… So it is you Sir!?”

“Good day. Erm… Sorry for the trouble.”

Regis lowered his head.

Latreille asked again to confirm.

“Sir Regis here is slated to take the promotion exams for Third grade admin officers correct?”

“Y-Yes Sir… A simple practical test to see if he can put the knowledge from books into practice.”

Regis was certain — No matter how much expectations others put on him, it was still impossible for him to pass.

They just needed to see Regis swing a sword once, if the eyes of the examiner weren’t deluded, they would definitely shout at Regis to ‘Do it seriously!’ When they finally understand that this unsightly swordsmanship was Regis’ best effort, they would undoubtedly call for a re-test.

Failing the promotion itself wouldn’t be much of a problem. Regis wasn’t that keen on making it big.

But the rules state that failing the exam meant he would need to re-take it. If he had to take the normal test, he would have to keep retaking it for the rest of his life.

— It would be great if there was a way for the practical exam to be waived, Regis thought.

Latreille continued:

“Lord Beylard, you probably heard… Grebauvar city has been taken. Many soldiers and citizens have become captives. I want to take back the city as soon as possible, but I can’t commit too much forces. After all, the capital needs to be defended too.”

“I received the report too of course. That fills me with pain.”

“And so, I have decided to recruit Sir Regis as a staff officer into the First Army, and would be setting off for the campaign soon.”

“Really!? But he is the Fourth Princess’…”

“Yes, I know his allegiance lies with Argentina. He is now transferred under my command with a temporary

secondment until we recapture Grebauvar City, that’s the agreement.”

“… It wouldn’t be a problem then.”

“Fufu, even if it’s me, I don’t plan on using this national crisis as a chip in a political power struggle.”

Latreille laughed.

— *It is true that he was an honorable person.*

Wasn’t this proof that he was so confident that he didn’t need to forcefully recruit talent? That was how Regis felt.

As expected, he was a man well suited to be the next emperor.

Latreille just needed to expel the High Britannia and Langobalt forces, and he could secure the throne without any more worries.

Few men dared oppose him now.

“I’m not doing this for political reasons, I recruited Sir Regis as a strategist purely for military reasons.”

“… I-Is he someone worthy of such a treatment? Even if his promotion succeeds, he would just be a Third grade admin officer right?”

Minister Beylard looked at Regis in surprise. He looked absolutely bewildered. Regis’ appearance probably played a part — he didn’t look like a soldier with his slender body, weak posture, hunches his back and soft voice.

It was natural for him to be doubtful.

— After all, Regis was the one who doubts himself the most.

Regis sighed.

Latreille smiled wryly.

“If you know a strategist who could take Fort Volks with a small number of troops, defeat the steam warship fleet and rout the supply unit transporting the newest models of rifles and cannons, please introduce me. I don’t want to borrow people from Argentina either.”

“Ah, erm… Well…”

“There isn’t anyone more suited. We can’t let the recapture plan fail, and time is of the essence. There isn’t time to wait for the exam to finish.’

His tone didn’t permit any objections. In response, minister Beylard lowered his head deeply.

“It is as you say. If the Field Marshall supervises the actual battle exam personally, no one would dispute the results.”

“Very well then. I will leave the procedures to you.”

“Understood.”

And so, things turned out this way. The situation changed before Regis even said anything.

The two of them walked out of the office.

They walked along the corridor. A young General Affairs Officer stood up straight and moved close to the wall hurriedly to make way when he saw Latreille coming.

The saluting man — turned into a statue with the salute being the theme of the artwork.

That officer showed a look of surprise momentarily when he saw Regis. He must be expecting Germain to be by Latreille’s side.

Actually, Regis had no other business in the palace.

He should be able to go back… but the Field Marshall spent so much time for his sake, so it would seem very arrogant if he begged his leave right after the matter was finished.

Regis considered himself someone who could read the mood.

He waited for Latreille to speak.

“Sir Regis, the promotion exams won’t be a problem now. I feel that Third grade admin officer isn’t high enough…”

“No, not at all! Field Marshall Latreille, you have been a big help. I am very grateful.”

“It is too early to thank me. Everything will have to wait until we retake Grebauvar city.”

“Ah, that won’t be a problem then.”

“Fu… You are unexpectedly confident.”

“Ehh? No, I just happen to know. From the intelligence we know, retaking it won’t be a problem. The question is how to rescue the captives, and minimize our losses.”

When he heard what Regis said, Latreille opened his eyes wide.

And laughed heartily.

*

Regis sighed in his heart.

He saw the pioneers looking at him with reverence, and couldn’t bring himself to say ‘I am only taking part to waive my practical test.”

The pioneer leader laid out the plans onto the table.

“Sir Strategist, this much has already been done.”

“…Hmmm… Things seem to be progressing well.”

“That’s right! But we are just moving earth… Can we really retake the fortress city by doing this?”

“Yes we can.”

The leader looked to the south. But the city wasn’t visible from this slope.

“Are we laying the foundations here, then building a fortress? But it would be better if we build it to the south towards the direction of the capital, right? What exactly is our goal?”

“Ah— … That… It is only natural for you to be confused…”

Regis said vaguely.

He couldn’t hand all the design plans to this pioneer team after all, since the battle plan might leak.

In the battle yesterday, the enemy saw through his plan.

Even if there was a spy, there wasn’t time for them to relay the intelligence, so the enemy had simply seen through Regis’ scheme.

However, you can never be too careful.

He split the plans and assigned them to several pioneer teams, and will make use of their effort as a whole.

“Well… This will probably be a very meaningful plan… I will be glad if you can take my word for it.”

“Ah, o-of course, I have never doubted Sir Strategist’s plan!”

“Thank you. Alright then, I need to visit the other sites…”

Regis saluted sloppily and then left that place.

*

The Imperial First Army set up camp about 60Ar (4287m) from Grebauvar fortress city that had been taken by the allied armies from High Britannia and Langobalt kingdom.

Regis returned to headquarters after inspecting several pioneer teams.

It was almost time for lunch.

Headquarters—

After returning a salute to the guards outside, he entered the tent.

When he was with Altina, he would sort through documents and read books inside the headquarters without worries.

But he couldn’t be so laid back and flaunt the rules in the Imperial First Army.

Latreille supported himself with both hands on the table at the deepest end of tent. Germain stood besides him, ready for any orders.

The knights around the conference table all turned their gazes toward Regis.

The young knight — Batteren, commander of the White Hare Knights asked anxiously.

“Is the plan proceeding smoothly, Sir Strategist?”

“… Just as planned.”

The atmosphere was heavy because of yesterday’s failure, everyone was on edge.

As the infiltration plan conducted in parallel succeeded, their efforts weren’t for naught. But the Imperial Army still lost many men. They couldn’t help staring at Regis, who proposed this plan, with accusatory eyes.

Latreille said:

“We have confirmed the tally for yesterday’s battle.”

“… Yes.”

Germain turned over the document and reported as he confirmed the numbers.

“The 3,000 cavalry are unharmed. We lost 600 artillery soldiers and 7 artillery pieces. And for the infantry… We lost 3,000, and are left with 11,000.”

“I see.”

Regis nodded, that was all he could do.

3,000 souls were lost in a battle he planned, Regis felt as if his heart was being stabbed.

However, if the one who planned the battle showed weakness, it would only make the other staff officers uneasy.

Regis wasn’t concerned about others evaluating him poorly. But if the plan was called off because he couldn’t put up a strong front — it would be very difficult to rescue those who were taken captives.

At the very least, he must not appear shaken, Regis pursed his lips.

Batteren glared at him.

“Did you expect such losses, Sir Strategist?”

It was within his expectations indeed.

But if he answered it so directly, it would definitely spur negative emotions unnecessarily. He didn’t want his relationship with the other staff officer to become really bad. If that happens and the frontline commander ignores the laid out plan, the battle would head towards failure.

Regis pondered for a moment before answering.

“… I give you my word… I mean no disrespect to the troops who gave their lives for this plan.”

“That’s…”

Batteren didn’t say anymore. He wasn’t fond of Regis, but this was the headquarters and in the presence of the Field Marshall Latreille, and the chief strategist Germain was still in the midst of reporting the results of the battle,

Batteren didn’t continue. He might have an emotional side because of his youth, but he was someone who could restrain himself.

German continued reporting.

“Our food stock is plentiful. We have a steady supply of water and firewood. Because of the large number of pioneers… our food consumption rate is high. But it shouldn’t be a problem as we can resupply from the capital.”

The capital kept on sending food and other supplies over.

This was arranged by the admin officer in charge of the First Army’s logistics and was proceeding smoothly. It was completely different from the Fourth Army where Regis did everything himself.

Latreille asked:

“What about the enemy?”

“Yes Sir. From the battle last night, we can assume that 30 of the enemy’s cannons have been destroyed. However, there should be 50 more cannons deployed on the walls…”

“If we have a shootout… Can we win?”

“We have 23 cannons left. If we continue at the same rate as yesterday, maybe we can.”

We should continue shooting if we can win! Before the atmosphere turned in that direction, Regis interjected:

“… If we kept doing that, the infantry and artillery troops would suffer heavy losses. Considering our national defense in the future, we should avoid such a battle.”

“Yes, we should avoid unnecessary losses.”

Latreille nodded.

According to Germain’s report — the shroud bridges seems to have been burned. Because they couldn't leave the bridges like that, so that was a natural course of action.

The enemy seemed to have many riflemen deployed on the walls.

“Sir Regis, what is our next move?”

“… We can only trust Third grade combat officer Vallis who infiltrated the steel production street. Since he didn’t send any smoke signal to call off the plan, we will proceed with the rescue operation in 5 days in accordance to the original plan.”

“If Vallis is killed, he won’t be able to send smoke signals right?”

“… Regrettably… We can’t do anything about that.”

“Should we give up on the captives then?”

“We will have to.”

It was a painful decision, but he didn’t have any follow up plan.

If the campaign dragged on too long, there was a high chance that enemy reinforcement would come. The probability that the other nations would attack was high too.

This would lead to further losses of lives.

No matter how many citizens got captured, he couldn’t let the elites of the Imperial First Army continue to suffer losses.

Soldiers should protect the citizens — Even though that was how he felt.

But if the Imperial First Army falls in the Grebauvar liberation campaign, it would expose even more citizens to danger.

This battle was watched closely by many. He had confirmed that the neighboring nations had sent people to spy on them.

They needed to display the strength of the Belgarian Empire.

Chapter 1 - Vallis’ Mission

The night of July 20th, in the steel production street of Grebauvar fortress city—

Vallis spied at the situation from inside the building.

Then pulled his head back immediately.

In the dark, a girl — Fel was waiting. Her distinctive features of blonde hair and green eyes glimmered faintly under the pale moonlight.

“How is it, Vallis?”

“Your information is accurate, Fel. There are four enemy guards at the entrance to the alley… They are equipped with the new rifles, combat knives on their waist.”

In front of them was a main road that divided the zone.

He would definitely be spotted if he crossed that road.

His adversaries were four guards.

But they were poorly trained. Vallis could tell their quality from the way they stood. Even though their eyes were sweeping the surroundings, their minds were mainly occupied by their chatters.

It would be easy to defeat them.

“… However… If they fire off just one shot, the plan would become a mess.”

“Yup.”

Right now, the enemies were wary about the Imperial First Army that was outside the city. But if they hear gunshots, they would definitely dispatch people to the northern zone.

“I have the mission of relaying the details of the rescue plan to the representative of the citizens.”

“I understand. This is to save everyone right?”

“Yes.”

“After that, will you kill those bastards?”

“There is no reason to let them off.”

Fel’s mother was killed by a High Britannian soldier. Despite that, she had to peddle to the enemy soldier in order to survive in the city occupied by the enemy.

Vallis might be a chevalier now, but when he was still a commoner orphan, he trained nonstop to be a soldier. He didn’t understand what kind of existence a mother was.

But he did understand her hatred.

“… In order for the plan to succeed, we need to avoid a battle with those sentries. Is there a way to do that?”

“Yes, leave it to me. I will draw their attention, then you can use the chance to slip through.”

“What are you going to do?”

“You want to know? Can I not say it?”

“… My mission will affect many lives. If the probability of success is low, we will need to find another way.”

“Hmm… How about hiding yourself, and then slip through

when you think I succeeded?”

“Will you be in danger?”

“Maybe.”

He didn’t intend to drag the citizens into this…

But he didn’t have the leisure of wasting too much time here. He needed to relay the detailed plans to the representatives and then complete the preparation for the escape before the plan was enacted.

Vallis nodded.

“I understand. I will leave it to you. I will cross the road when I feel the sentries have let their guard down.”

“Yes!”

Umm, the young girl clenched her fists.

A child like movement.

Apparently, Fel was just 14.

“… Sorry, I shouldn’t have dragged a child into this.”

“Ahaha, you are really concerned about strange things.”

“It’s strange?”

“This is war. Even a child would die if they couldn’t fight. Well then, I will be going.”

“… Sorry.”

“Really now.”

She could only smile awkwardly.

She emptied the basket of bread and wine.

— What would she do?

*

Fel walked across the main road openly under the moonlight.

She was a citizen captured in the steel production street. There was no problem in doing this.

Vallis hid in the shadow of a building nearby, peeking at the situation.

— What would she do to attract the sentries’ attention?

Even though the attention of the guard approached by Fel would fall on her, there were four of them. Vallis would be spotted by the other sentries if he crossed the road.

Even if he dashed across quietly, it was very likely that he would be spotted.

Fel spoke to the sentry:

“Good evening, Mr soldier.”

“Ahh, it’s you. Go on then.”

A curt reply. Seemed like one of the soldier could speak Belgarian.

Fel nodded, then stopped as if she was troubled.

The sentry asked:

“What’s the matter?”

“W-Well… business didn’t go well today…”

Fel showed him her basket.

It was empty, she already took out the bread and wine bottle.

The sentry shrugged.

“That’s a pity.”

“Neh, can you give me some bread…? My mother is waiting for me. I will be scolded if I go back empty handed like this.”

“Even if you say that, our rations have been cut recently.”

“Don’t be so stingy. I will give you a good price okay? How about it, all four of you for just one loaf of bread?”

“She will do all four of us for one loaf of bread.”

The sentry who spoke just now translated to High Britannian for the others.

The group looked at each other, their expressions changed.

“That’s cheap.”

“But she is just a kid.”

“I don’t mind.”

“… Indeed, it’s a bargain.”

Fel smiled.

“Right? I will always ask for bread and wine for one go okay? It is not too peaceful today, so it didn’t go well… Hey, Mr Soldier…”

Fel licked her thumb lightly.

And made a slurping sound.

Her lips made a smacking sound.

She got all the sentries to focus on her lips.

“How about it? Everyone praises me often. You will be satisfied with just one loaf of bread…”

“Ahh… Seems like a good deal.”

One sentry said, and the other guards also smiles deviously.

“It’s a deal huh? One at a time would be fine right? Let’s head to the toilet.”

“Haha… that’s true.”

A crude hand grabbed Fel’s shoulder.

“You can’t refuse now alright? I am really rough.”

“Hmmm? Erm, I… don’t really understand High Britannian.”

“He said you can’t scream even if it hurts.”

Fel looked as if she was on the verge of tears when she heard the translation, and forced a smile.

“I-I see… It’s fine… Aha… Haha…”

Vallis ran over.

As the sentries placed their attention on Fel, they were not guarding the place any more. He could cross right now.

— In order to save the majority of the citizens, using such a plan couldn’t be helped!

She knew too. She won’t lose her life either. It would be fine.

“… No problems… How is that possible!”

Vallis concealed the sound of his footsteps and ran, but towards a place different from the original plan.

He didn’t avoid the sentries and crossed the road.

The soldier holding Fel’s shoulder suddenly lifted his head.

“Hmm? What?’

As Vallis was wearing a High Britannian uniform, the enemy’s reaction was slower.

The other sentries also noticed and looked his way.

One of them raised his rifle.

“Hey, halt! Stay right there and state your unit! If you don’t stop—!”

“No!”

Fel grabbed the guard’s right arm tightly.

“Get out of my way, galian!”

“Hya!?”

An elbow struck Fel’s temple, and she flew away.

And collapsed onto the ground.

But the time she stalled was more than enough for Vallis.

“Mortley mobs!”

He belonged to the elites of the Belgarian military, the First Army— And was known to be the elite of the elites amongst them.

Compared to the poorly trained High Britannians who weren’t

even proper guards, just soldiers on night sentry duty, there was a world of difference.

Vallis right hand flicked.

The soldier who struck Fel sprayed blood from his throat.

“Gah!?”

“E-Enemy attack!?

The second soldier who shouted was pierced in the heart by the short sword. He died instantly.

He was half a step away from the 3rd sentry with the raised rifle. At this extreme distance, Vallis sliced off his fingers. He couldn’t shoot since he couldn’t pull the trigger.

The 4th turned and ran.

Vallis threw his sword at the back of the soldier escaping from him. It stabbed into the guard’s spine, and he fell without uttering a sound.

The 3rd man who was still alive drew the combat knife with his left hand.

“U, uwahhh—!!

“Shut up.”

Vallis dodged the first thrust, then stepped forward, grabbing his opponent’s throat and crushed his windpipe.

Vallis didn’t end him rightly, but that stopped him from making any sound. The man rolled on the ground and rolled around in intense pain.

“~~~~!!”

He would be dead a short while later.

“… Suppression complete.”

Vallis said softly.

He shifted his gaze, and saw Fel sitting on the ground weakly and trembling.

She had a tough side, but she was a citizen, female and a child, so this was expected.

“Ahh… Ugh… K-Killed…?”

“Your wounds shouldn’t be fatal. If you can stand, help me take care of the bodies.”

“……”

Without waiting for an answer, Vallis picked up a body with both his hands.

There was a commotion after all, and there was a chance the enemy sentries might be changing shift. He needed to hide his track quickly.

It was fine even if the bodies were found later, he just needed enough time to meet the representative of the citizens.

Fel picked up the knife on the ground.

“… You need to hide this too?”

“Yes.”

“… W-Was my plan… bad?”

She showed a timid face.

Vallis opened a storehouse in a residence nearby, and threw the corpse in. He did the same for the other two corpses, then retrieved his sword.

“Fel’s plan… worked, since it drew the attention of the sentries.”

“I-Is that so? Then why did you do something so dangerous…?”

“Because I can’t turn a blind eye to this.”

“But, if the gun went off, the plan would…!”

“Even though the situation would become tougher, it doesn’t mean failure. I would rather the enemy search for me then let that thing happen. Soldiers should protect the citizens. Fel is a citizen. So I will absolutely protect you.”

The truth was, Vallis knew what he did was reckless.

He was reminded time and again in training that it was foolish to endanger the majority in order to help one person.

Crystal like tears rolled down Fel’s cheeks.

“… Thank… You.”

This might not be the correct decision for a soldier.

Even so, when he saw Fel struggling to hold back her tears, Vallis felt he did the right thing.

Chapter 2 - Regis and Jessica

The noon of the 22nd, in the headquarters of the Belgarian First Army—

After the conference, only Latreille, Germaine and Regis stayed behind.

“Sir Regis, how are things progressing?”

“… It’s going smoothly. We can achieve something if we start right now. But in order to reduce risks, we are performing minor adjustments.”

“I see.”

Germaine laid out a map on the table.

“… Can such a thing really be done?”

“200 years ago, in a valley similar to this, there was a siege battle that used the same tactic. Although what I read was a drama that adapted that battle.”

“Using a drama as reference and putting the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers on this bet… I can’t stop worrying.”

Germaine frowned.

Regis scratched his head.

“… We are replicating something that did happen before.”

Latreille stared hard at Regis.

“Can our army achieve this?”

“… Yes we can. According to the surveillance of the advance party, and the work by our army of pioneers in this half month, our preparations were done adequately.”

No one could tell for certain.

If Regis were to list the uncertain factors, he could go on all day.

But there was no meaning in listing them. This was the plan that had the best chance of success. That was what Regis thought.

Latreille smiled.

“Well, we will be mocked if we say we are uneasy at this point. Proceed as planned.”

“I understand.”

His eyes seemed to be seeing right through Regis’ mind, as he looked into Regis’ eyes.

Some time ago, during the meeting after the Seventh Army lost to the High Britannian Army— Regis felt something about Latreille was off. That was because he didn’t look at anyone’s eyes at all.

But right now, he was staring as if he was looking right through one’s soul.

— *Was I mistaken? Or did he recover?*

No matter what it was, there didn’t seem to be a problem now.

Latreille shifted his gaze back to the map and bit his lower lips.

“But…”

Germaine ask:

“Is there anything wrong?”

“If this plan works… Well, the enemy will do something about it…”

“Yes.”

“But then, Grebauvar city will…”

“Well…”

The two men looked at Regis.

He already answered this question when he proposed the plan.

“… It can be rebuilt, but it will take a very long time.”

“And so, the frontline should be pulled back onto the fortress at the top of the mountain, that’s Sir Regis’ proposal correct?”

“That’s right.”

Grebauvar city was situated to the north of the mountain, while Mauldre city was to the south. On top of the mountain was an ancient mid sized fortress.

It was the old front line before Grebauvar became a fort.

As the cannons during the time it was built weren’t that great in quality, they would need to revamp the stone walls. Despite that, considering the advantageous high ground terrain, it would be easier to defend by basing their defenses here.

Latreille shook his head.

“Sir Regis, you intend to cede some of our territory away?”

“We will lose the city, but it would show the neighboring nations that the Empire is still a formidable force.”

“That’s not enough.”

“If we hold on to Grebauvar city, it would place a heavy burden on the garrison unit. Let’s place the defensive stronghold on the top of the mountain top for the time being,

then dispatch our forces to the other front lines. In the long term, this would be better for the Empire.”

“Langobalt Kingdom took a city from the Empire by trickery. They will suffer for this.”

“I-In that case… What about the Kingdom of High Britannia?”

“Of course, they would need to pay for what they did too.”

“… Taking on two nations at the same time is too reckless. And the Empire had just lost a lot of its men.”

“You are saying we don’t have enough soldiers?”

“Yes. Launching an attack on Langobalt Kingdom will require at least 100,000 highly trained soldiers.”

Germaine scowled. Considering Regis’ position, he was overstepping his boundaries by criticizing Latreille’s long term plans.

However, the subject Latreille himself permitted it, so he didn’t interrupt forcefully.

Latreille laughed lightly.

“I see, Sir Regis is unexpectedly pragmatic. Even though you are a tactician who uses unorthodox schemes.”

“… Actually, fighting in an orthodox way is better. Taking it a step further, not fighting a war would be the best.”

“Fufu, it is true that the Imperial Army is exhausted and undermanned— Going by old standards.”

“What do you mean?”

“Sir Regis should have noticed too. After all, you sent captured rifles to Argentina.”

“T-That is…”

Before this expedition, he received a letter from Altina, saying that Eric lost his grip power after getting injured.

He suggested letting Eric become a rifleman.

And not just protecting Altina with a rifle in hand.

In the future, when they could raise a riflemen unit, they would need instructors. Regis hoped that someone he could

trust would be familiar with the usage of rifles as soon as possible.

— As expected, the things I sent from the capital to the Fourth Army had been inspected.

Regis didn’t think they would go that far as to break the wax seal and read the letter…

Right now, Latreille’s policies were more important than the letter.

This was one of the things Regis wanted to find out when he took part in the First Army’s expedition.

— *After Latreille becomes Emperor, what policies will he enact?*

“War from now on will be the era of rifles.”

“… That’s true.”

Regis nodded.

After returning to the capital, he started laying out his intelligence network. Carol who runs a bookstore and Fanrine from the southern aristocrats, people like them.

They will send news if there was anything major.

“… You recruited a lot of blacksmiths from Rouen city right?”

“Fufu, Sir Regis doesn’t have much backing in the capital, but your ears sure are sharp. How impressive.”

“Even though development should just be beginning… Could it be, the key to producing them has been figured out?’

Latreille pondered for a moment.

Germaine was covering his own mouth, as if he was restraining himself.

Just from that, Regis could tell something.

And Latreille realized that ‘Regis noticed something’.

He said with an awkward smile:

“Fu… Personally… I think Sir Regis possesses the talent to change the fate of the Empire.”

“Eh, that’s too much…!?’

“Judging from your achievements, you are worthy of such an evaluation.”

“No…”

He was about to refute it, but he remembered what Fanrine said.

“*No matter how unconfident you are, those who succeed would be expected to bring success the next time as well.*”

What he should do wasn’t to lament his lack of confidence, but to continue thinking of the next best strategy.

Regis took a deep breath and asked:

“… Since I have been evaluated so highly… Can you tell me about the development of the rifles, Field Marshall Sir?”

“Fine, show him that.”

Latreille instructed.

It was rare seeing Germaine not acting immediately. *Is this really okay?* His confused face seemed to be saying just that.

But the loyal adjutant wouldn’t go against his master’s wishes.

He took out a wooden crate from the depths of the headquarters' tent and put it on the table.

“Have a look.”

“… Is this a rifle?”

“Yes, this is a prototype that had just been sent here. There are several candidates, but I think this is the best one.”

“… I will take a look.”

Regis opened the crate.

A rifle was inside.

At a glance, it wasn’t too different from the High Britannian rifles.

But the design seemed sleeker, and there seemed to be some differences in its mechanism.

“This is the Belgarian Empire made Fusil 851 rifle.”

Even the name had been decided.

“… Can I hold it?”

“Of course.”

Holding it in his hands, Regis found the rifle to be a little lighter. Then he pulled the lever and opened the cartridge chamber, he found that rubber was used to ensure an airtight seal.

Rubber was a valuable commodity that could only be obtained from the south.

It was possible for Belgaria, but High Britannia didn’t have the means to obtain large quantities of rubber.

“… I see.”

“This isn’t much of a difference. The ammunition is this.”

Placed on the table appeared to be a bullet wrapped by paper.

“Paper cartridge? Not metal cartridge?”

“Yes, I understand it would be difficult to mass produce that immediately. But if it is this sort of paper cartridge, it can be made right away.”

“… I see.”

“It is more powerful and has better range than High Britannia made rifles. One of its flaws is it has more consumable parts, but if we stick to this method, we can begin mass production very soon.”

“We are going to mass produce this already?”

“We have to make up for lost time. The development of steam engines and cannons are ongoing at full speed. But it would take more time than making this cartridge here.”

“… How long would it be before our weapons can match High Britannia?”

“In half a year or so, we will catch up… And of course, we are aiming for even stronger weapons.”

Regis was surprised.

Belgaria had the potential to become an industrial powerhouse, this much was clear by checking the records.

The last Emperor wasn’t concerned with politics and military affairs, and didn’t use his powers effectively.

And Latreille will rouse the slumbering giant nation.

The power of the Empire will surpass Regis’ imagination.

— *Mass producing new rifles in half a year, with the production of cannons and steam engines as their goal!*

“… But, if that is the case, shouldn't we… consolidate our front lines and focus on our internal affairs? The more time passes, the bigger our advantage.”

“No, that’s wrong.”

“… Is that so?”

“Right now, only the Belgaria Empire and High Britannia possess such rifles. But ten years down the road, the neighboring nations would be able to produce such rifles. After all, these technologies will spread.”

“…That’s true.”

No matter how much they hide it, things like technology would spread. Even in a skirmish, no matter win or lose, the enemy would be able to capture one or two rifles.

They might not be able to create the exact same thing, but could still make a similar replica. They will then use their creativity to research the parts that are inadequate, and maybe even develop something better.

Latreille held the Fusil 851 rifle in his hands.

“I plan to use this to conquer all the neighboring nations within two years.”

“What…!?”

Regis was dumbfounded.

Latreille’s expression was serious. Germaine seemed to concur too.

Regis explored all the possibilities in his mind.

— *This is reckless.*

Latreille was unmoved.

“Sir Regis doesn’t seem to agree? Are you saying we can’t win?”

“… It is regrettable, but things will probably turn out the same way as the High Britannian did. Rifles and cannons are very reliant on supply. They can’t bring a huge quantity of ammunition to a shootout, and once their stocks run dry, they won’t be able to fight. In the end, we can’t escape the fate of our supply team being hit and losing the battle.”

“The enemy might not have a Regis d’Auric.”

“… Fighting on multiple fronts and assuming the supply lines won’t be attacked would be too optimistic.”

“I won’t launch attacks that are meaningless strategically. I don’t think we can achieve victory with rifles alone.”

“… Why are you so adamant on invasion to such an extent?”

How unfathomable.

The fact that the Belgarian Empire could produce guns would already be a huge deterrent to the neighboring nations.

But just like the retreat of the High Britannia Army, war wasn’t so simple that it could be won with rifles alone.

Latreille sighed. He gazed into the distance— As if he was looking at a place far away.

“This is to allow the Belgarian Empire… to exist forever. The glory and prosperity of the Empire being at its peak is nothing but an illusion. We are falling behind in the arms race, lost a few battles and the enemy was right at the capital’s doorsteps… This nation is too small. I want to change it into a superpower that is as huge as the *La Dame Blanche*.”

His ambition is too big. Really too big. Regis thought. In order to accomplish this goal, countless wars awaited him.

“… So we have to subjugate the neighboring countries?”

“If there is only one Empire in this world, nothing would be destroyed by war anymore.”

“… There are many nations that fell because of internal strife.”

“All revolutions that succeed are basically linked to an external nation.”

“… Plagues and famine could be the reason too.”

“If the country expanded, even if there is a catastrophe, they can receive aid from other places. The Empire is already enacting such a policy.”

“… If the nation was too big, central governance would be imperfect. But if the territorial lords were given too much power, the super nation would split into several countries in the end.”

What he mentioned were the basic concepts of political economics.

And of course, Latreille had thought about them. Regis asked these questions just to play the part of an audience.

“A territory that reached a certain size would be designated as a ‘state’. Governors would be assigned to govern the states, but they would not be given military power.”

“Eh?”

“In order to govern a large nation, it is necessary to have a national army. Argentina might be the commander of the Fourth Army, but she isn’t the landlord of the area around Beilschmidt and Fort Volks, right?”

“Yes.”

“All military units will follow the same system, and the nobility army would be abolished. Even if a landlord has the intent to revolt, he won’t be able to do anything without an army. As for the army, the commanders would be rotated out periodically to other assignments.”

“..! Abolish the nobility army!”

“Yes, the assignment of the staff officers will be decided solely by the Ministry of Military Affairs. The opinions of the commanders will be respected of course… But they won’t be allowed to freely hire or dismiss anyone. And the personnel would not be allowed to stay in the same unit for too long.”

If the staff officers were fresh faces, it would be hard for them to scheme any conspiracy.

Even if they were prepared to revolt, the plans would be for

naught if the commander was posted out. If any strange rumors arise, they just needed to change the personnel.

If the assignments of personnel were frequent, the chance of the military command getting too close to the landlord would be low.

But of course, the new commanders would have a hard time getting a hold of their subordinates…

“… It won’t be a problem if an opposition that could match us doesn’t exist, is that what you mean?”

“That’s correct.”

Abolish the nobility army, taking control of the military back from the landlords and the nation controlling the sole army. Commanders would be treated as someone doing a job, not someone who held governance authority.

Regis felt a chill on his back.

He had read similar ideas in books. However, he had never seen a specific set of plans that combine so many elements together.

How would the intellectuals evaluate this idea? They would definitely write about it on plenty of books.

How exhilarating.

— Completely new.

Latreille saw a completely new form a nation could take.

Regis thought about it.

“… No…All this was built on the precondition that all the neighboring nations were subjugated.”

“We have to win. We need to. If not, the Belgarian Empire would one day enter the ranks of perished nations.”

“… Isn’t there a way for us to deepen our relationships with our neighboring countries?”

“Even Argentina was moved by you. Sir Regis is really a pacifist.”

“… I don’t deny that. We might be able to conquer other nations through war, but we can’t extinguish the seeds of fire. Many people will die, and their grudge would be left

behind.”

“This policy is in place in order to seal that away.”

“… Using the nobility army to invade other nations, then abolish the nobility army after it is done. Will the nobles follow such a policy?”

“If they resist, there would be no choice but to make use of the Imperial First Army.”

“Then it would evolve into a large scale civil war. And with the nobility armies of the grand nobles as their opponent, the First Army might not prevail. After all, all armies would possess rifles by that point.”

“Even if that happens, I still plan to win of course.”

“… Just how many wars do you want to fight?”

“I will fight with anyone who stands in the way of my dream. And defeat them all. If not, I won’t be able to build a utopia that would be evergreen and flourishing even after a thousand years.”

Fiery flames seemed to be burning in Latreille’s eyes.

As expected of Altina’s brother — Regis thought.

A powerful aura.

If not for his experience from the past year, Regis probably would have knelt down and swore fealty. That was how great a presence he had.

But Regis swore an oath.

— He will act solely for the sake of Altina. And make preemptive moves, even if he himself lacked confidence, he would still act.

There was no time to think of the best strategy to deal with the problem. And he wasn’t just handling this one issue, he wouldn’t be able to change the situation if he didn’t act.

Even though Latreille was thinking of creating a revolutionary kind of governance, Hegemonism was still at its core.

Its path differs completely from the goal Altina wanted to achieve, even more so for Regis. If it was in the past, he would be satisfied with learning this and back down.

But he moved forward instead.

“… Was His Majesty an obstacle to Prince Latreille’s dream too?”

Germaine opened his eyes wide.

“What did you say!?”

Latreille’s face remained still, as if he was wearing a mask.

“……”

But, that was why Regis could see the truth.

If Latreille was not involved with the Emperor’s death, then he would lash out in anger unhesitatingly, no matter how highly he evaluated Regis as a strategist.

Latreille squeezed out a stiff voice:

“… For the good of the many, if I could save the lives of a million Imperial citizens, I would swing the sword even if I have to do it again… Tradition, power, obsession with purity… How many lives had been lost because of these things? What can they give to the people? We can’t stop moving forward

for the sake of our dreams. This is for the sake of not wasting the blood that had been spilled. Sir Regis, do think very, very carefully… where exactly should you be standing.”

You will die if you get in my way — Is that what he means?

He was bold enough to murder the Emperor. Not just Regis, he wouldn’t hesitate to kill his own sister Altina.

He understood another thing.

Latreille was confident that he had the courts in his palms.

That’s why he could openly admit to Regis who was working under Altina that he committed regicide.

Without evidence, it doesn’t matter who jumps out to protest — That was probably what he thought.

Regis lowered his gaze.

“… My mind isn’t that great… Can you give me some time to organize my thoughts? At this stage, I think we should focus our energy on the siege.”

Latreille nodded.

“Yes, as Sir Regis pointed out, I may have been a little hasty. Let’s talk about this after the dust has settled for the matter of Grebauvar city.”

“… My deepest thanks.”

Regis saluted and left the headquarters tent.

*

The sunlight was glaring.

He felt as if he just escaped a giant nest of snakes.

Phew~… deep breaths.

The sentries saluted in a panic.

There seemed to be something in their mouth.

— Snacks?

Two ladies were standing before them.

“Thank you for your hard work, Sir Regis.”

One of them was Fanrine.

Her long black hair reached to her waist, and she was wearing a black one piece dress. With a large ribbon above the hips.

Even though she was a lady from the southern noble house Tiraso Laverde, she was tasked by the Ministry of Military Affairs as an escort officer to Regis’ side, and even followed him on this expedition.

Even though she would converse like an adult sometimes, she was a cheerful woman who always showed a warm smile.

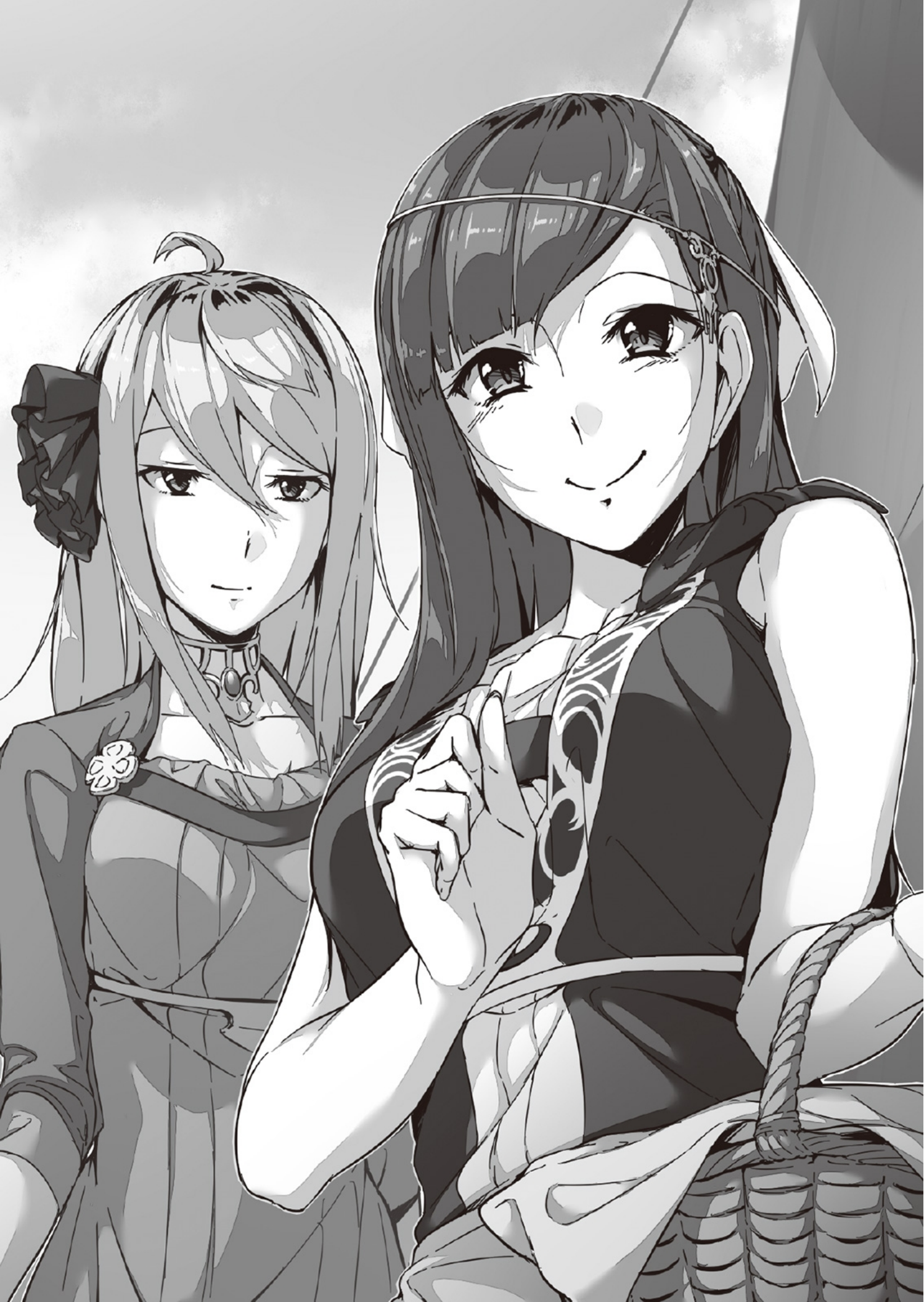
And the other person—

Light colored hair, pale skin and slender limbs made others feel that she was a noble lady.

She was a woman with clear eyes and chime like voice.

Her name was Jess.

“… Thank you for your hard work… Master Auric.”



“Ahh, thank you.”

She was a maid serving Regis.

Dispatched by the Ministry of Military Affairs.

Why had the Ministry done that?

Regis didn’t know the actual reason, was it because of Altina, or was there another ulterior motive?

Jess came with the letters of recommendation from the Minister of Ceremony Marquis Bergerac and his grandson — The third prince Bastian.

She spoke fluent Belgarian, had perfect etiquette in the way she moves, and was very competent in housekeeping… She had no flaws as a talent.

Even Fanrine who was wary of her in the beginning felt comfortable interacting with her during this campaign.

Although Regis wasn’t good at dealing with women older than him…

He asked Fanrine:

“So, why did you come here?”

“Ufufu… Because I baked some snacks, so I wanted to share them with Regis and everyone else.”

She reached for the basket she was carrying.

She pulled back the white cloth, revealing cookies that were out of place in this battlefield.

The fragrance spread out.

It smelled delicious.

This was actually made with a temporary built stove in an army base.

“Amazing… Ah, but…”

If the inflexible staff officers from the First Army saw this, they would definitely snap at him saying ‘you think you are here for a picnic?’

Fanrine’s shoulders slouched.

“It’s no good?”

“Ah, no, this is good… But you have to be careful about the timing you take these out…”

Jess lowered her head and apologized.

“… It’s all because of what I said.”

“Ms Jess?”

“… Because I heard when people think about things or discuss difficult topics, they would want to eat something sweet.”

“That is true. Oh right, why not get the head chef to approve this?”

Fanrine clapped her hands together.

“That’s it! I want some tea to go with the snacks.”

“Haha…”

Seemed like she had grown used to an elegant lifestyle, and

will act gracefully no matter where she was.

— Speaking of which, Altina often drinks tea too.

The upper class ladies were probably all like this.

“Please join us, Sir Regis.”

“No, the conference is over and I should head back to my tent. There are things I need to do.”

“… These are made painstakingly by Lady Fanrine.”

Jess said quietly, which made Regis heart wince. He couldn’t remain unmoved after hearing that.

Fanrine said apologetically.

“E-Erm, I didn’t want to disturb you when you are so busy… But Sir Regis, you haven’t eaten lunch yet, right?”

Regis planned to have lunch, but with how things were going, he would probably have to skip.

— *If I don’t eat now, my next meal will probably be tomorrow.*

“That’s right… well then, I will take you up on your offer. I’m a bit busy though… There are many things I need to do before noon.”

“What’s the matter?”

After hearing Jess’ query, Regis nodded.

“You two better pack your bags too. If possible, load them onto the carriage first.”

Fanrine tilted her head.”

“Are we going to shift the base?”

“… Maybe.”

Regis and the others went to the head chef and left the snacks there.

After he tasted a few — probably for poison, they requested the head chef to make snacks with the same taste, so they could enjoy it with tea.

After that, Regis went back to his tent.

It was called a tent, but it was just canvas wrapped around pillars as walls, and didn’t have a roof.

Regis pulled back the drapes hanging at the entrance.

— And found a young maid.

It was a girl with brown long hair, her bangs covering her eyes. She wore glasses and had a bit of freckles on her cheeks.

“Ugh…”

She made a soft sound.

Regis tilted his head.

“Ara, is something the matter, erm, Ms Franca?”

Jess seemed to be glaring at Franca for a moment.

Fanrine put her hands on her waists, and said with a stern tone:

“You there! Even if you are Sir Regis’ maid, you can’t enter your master’s quarters without permission, understand?”

“I-I’m… Sorry…”

Franca squeaked softly with a deep bow.

Jess was apologizing beside her too.

“… My deep apologies. I was the one who instructed her to change the bedsheets earlier.”

“I’m not sure how things were done in your previous household, but it’s a disgrace for the master to be surprised when he returns to his quarters. Please be careful about this.”

As expected of a daughter from an aristocratic House, she would not hold back when she had to speak up.

This was the first time Regis lived while being attended to by a maid, what was on his mind was simply ‘Is that so?’

He scratched his head.

“… Well, I will be in your care.”

Intermission

Fuwa~! Franca breathed out.

This was a river some distance away from Regis' tent. She held the bedsheets that needed to be changed in her arms.

"What a pain—!!"

"… Please don't speak Germanian in a place like this."

Jess scolded her.

No, that was just an alias — it was actually Jessica Schweinzeberg.

"Ah, right."

"… We won't know if someone might hear us."

"I get it, Sis."

The young girl with the alias Franca, was actually Franziska Schweinzeberg.

There wasn’t anyone near them, but it pays to be careful.

Jessica asked:

“… And so? How was it?”

“No problem of course. Even though there are all sorts of annotations all over it, I still got the gist of the whole plan. Well? I’m amazing right? Amazing right?”

“… This was the time I bought for you with the excuse of making the snacks a little better, it is only natural you can do this much.”

“Ahh, yes… Sis went to make snacks huh.. Hehe.”

“… ‘There’s no way you can make it’, is that what you want to say?”

“Sorry.”

Even though Franziska had the advantage in terms of strength, her sister was terrifying in another way. She wasn’t as smart as her sister.

“… Well, leaving what happened just now aside, it would be better for you to not get close to Master Auric. Even the place was dim and you were some distance away, you are still someone he fought with before. There is still a chance he might discover your true identity.”

“A girl as cute as me isn’t that common after all.”

“… Let’s talk about the battle plan.”

Even though what she said was ignored, Franziska wasn’t disheartened.

Speaking of which, just recalling that plan was enough to make her hair stand on ends. The plan formulated by the Imperial Army was extraordinary.

“Hey Sis, I wonder if that strategist Regis Auric is actually a monster.”

“… We came here because we have such a suspicion.”

*

About a month ago—

Maybe it was coincidence, or maybe they were guided by the stars, the Third Prince Bastian was acquainted with Franziska and her group.

They spent a night in a room in the palace loaned to them.

Dinner could only be described as extravagant.

Breakfast was the same.

Even though the enemy was right at the capital’s doorsteps not too long ago, they couldn’t feel such an atmosphere now. Luxurious dishes were laid out on the table.

Fresh salad, vegetable soup, and roast beef with blood still dripping from it. Soft bread and a thick slice of ham.

It’s probably because the prince ordered to ‘treat them as if they are my friends’, the palace personnel didn’t even check their identity.

Thanks to that, they could collect information from within the palace and capital.

That night, Franziska and her sisters started analyzing the information they gathered.

“So big bro wasn’t executed after all?”

“… That’s true.”

Jessica nodded. She could use astrology to deduce things they couldn’t see or hear. So Franziska weren’t very surprised by this.

On the other hand, the youngest child Martina raise her hands in joy.

“That’s great—”

“Yeah, that is wonderful.”

“… However, it will be impossible to rescue him if we go on like this.”

When she heard what Jessica said, Franziska smacked the table.

“But why!?”

“… Firstly, it is very difficult to rescue big brother with just the three of us. And the Imperial Army is also wary about the

remnants of our mercenary group plotting a rescue.”

“Isn’t that the reason why we are linking up with the remaining members of ‘Renard Pendu’? Didn’t we come to the capital for this?”

“Sigh… After collecting intelligence here…”

Just as they planned, the entire day was used to gather information.

“So why is it impossible!?”

“… If things carry on this way, ‘Renard Pendu’ will be doomed.”

“Ehh!? Even though big bro isn’t here, these guys are very strong!? Even if they fought the imperial army several times their numbers, they wouldn’t lose immediately!”

Franziska fought alongside them plenty of times.

They were not just for show, and were really strong.

Jessica sighed.

“I feel the same… Normally, I wouldn’t worry about them. However, if things go on like this, they will really be in danger.”

“Go on this way? What will happen?”

“… According to the intel, after High Britannia received the aid of Langobalt Kingdom, they occupied Grebauvar city. Naturally, ‘Renard Pendu’ was there too.”

“Why did they take the city?”

“They wanted to show the neighboring countries that the Belgarian Empire is already exhausted. If they could keep it up for half a year or so, there would be nations who will think that the Empire is nothing to be feared.

“I see. The Imperial forces did suffer heavy losses in this war! Do you think the plan will work?”

“… Belgaria will be dispatching the First Army in order to retake Grebauvar city. They will be setting off a week later.”

“Field Marshall Latreille will be going huh. It’s that rather impressive guy who announced that he will be the next Emperor. Seems like he is serious about this campaign.”

“In this war with High Britannia, the Fourth Princess got all the spotlight, so he is a little flustered. However, the problem doesn’t lie with the commander.”

“What?”

Jessica then mentioned an ominous name.

“… Regis d’Auric… He is joining the First Army as a strategist.”

“Ah.”

The invasion by High Britannia was proceeding smoothly as planned.

That was because of the stubbornness of the Imperial soldiers, and they were slow in thinking up strategies against the new rifles.

However, the Fourth Army led by Argentina was completely different. They defeated the battleship fleet that held all the advantages, and even routed the supply division.

This was all because of the tactics of the strategist known as

Regis d’Auric. Such a rumor was spreading among the populace.

And Gilbert who was known as the Mercenary King was also captured because of his unorthodox tactic of ‘creating fog’.

Turning time back to before the war, Franziska received the mission of stalling Argentina’s army at Fort Volks.

However, the unit attacking Fort Volks was defeated in just one night, and the plan to stall them failed.

Franziska was even admonished by Gilbert for that failure. Her body will shake just from hearing Regis’ name.

“Isn’t that guy Argentina’s subordinate?”

“… He either had an invitation from Prince Latreille, or he recommended himself… All sorts of rumours are floating around. No matter what, they will leave the capital in a week.”

“Ugh… But even a monster-like strategist like him won’t be able to recapture the fortress city so easily right?”

Jessica shrugged.

“… Optimism… is your virtue huh?”

“Am I wrong?”

“… If we don’t act now, we will definitely be defeated.”

“I understand. Well then, what should we do?”

Franziska was a mercenary with plenty of experience on the battlefield. She would not hesitate if there was a need to fight.

Martina clenched her fist tight.

“Alright—! Martina will work hard!”

“… Sigh, there’s just the three of us… who will be doing this. Reviving ‘Renard Pendu’… and getting our big brother back.”

That’s so difficult — Franziska thought.

Just getting the members of ‘Renard Pendu’ defending the city to gather was difficult enough. They numbered just 700.

While Gilbert was imprisoned by the Fourth Army, and should

be in Fort Volks by now.

As of now, the Fourth Army probably numbered over 10,000.

— Normally speaking, they could only give up.

However, their sister Jessica had the title of ‘Magician’.

Even in a desperate situation, she could turn things around.

“… First, let’s use the good honest Third Prince.”

*

After the three of them asked the servants, they started searching for Bastian.

As they were wearing the dresses of Belgarian noble ladies, they weren’t questioned when they walked around the palace.

And then, along the corridor towards the Ministry of Military Affairs—

“Yo, bro.”

“… You have returned from High Britannia. It’s great that you are unharmed.”

They found Bastian.

However, this wasn't an atmosphere where Franziska and the others could intrude on. Bastian was facing off with a general in glamorous attire.

Franziska and the others hid in the shadows of a pillar and peeked at the situation..

—Hmm? Did Bastian address him as ‘bro’? That means, that blonde man is Prince Latreille!?

As they were in dresses, Franziska and company were unarmed.

If he realized they were actually mercenaries of ‘Renard Pendu’…

Should they run?

No.

She would be fine, but Jessica couldn’t run fast, and Martina

was also here.

Franziska and the others decided to continue hiding and observing.

Bastian sighed.

“Not really~ I had a hard time alright? Chased by the army, shot by guns and fell down a cliff.”

“You should learn how to settle down. Be it politics or military, you should start contributing to the nation.”

“You want me to help you? You haven’t taken the throne, but you are talking as if you are the Emperor, bro.”

“… Dissatisfied?”

“No, that’s fine too. Argentina and I are both idiots. Even though I felt politics was troublesome not too long ago… But what will bro think… if I say this?”

“Hmm?”

“Does the Belgarian Empire need a senate?”

Latreille looked surprised.

Bastian who never listened to lessons properly was actually discussing politics. And it was a proposal that leaned towards liberalism, that’s what shocked him.

He then smiled wryly.

“Fufu… I was wondering what you wanted to say… Which friends of yours told you that?”

“Well, I don’t deny that my friend taught me this knowledge. But I only said this after understanding it in my own way.”

“How ridiculous. The one who decides the will of the Empire, is the Emperor who sits at the top of the flawless system which carries out his will thoroughly. There isn't any need for an organization to consul the Emperor. Remember this well—The Emperor is an inviolable existence.”

“Yes, I think bro will become an excellent Emperor. But that’s not so certain after age catches up with you. You might not be as exemplary as you were in your younger days.”

“… When the time comes, maybe someone more suitable will dispose me.”

Latreille raised the corner of his lips.

Bastian stared at him.

“Hey! Isn’t that…!”

“You already heard about it anyway…”

Bastian withdrew his hand back to his chest.

“Bro… You really.., did it!?”

“Hmmp, will you believe me if I deny it?”

“No matter what, that guy isn’t beyond forgiveness!”

He attempted to pull out his dagger.

But before that, a white blade appeared right before Bastian.

“!?”

This was abnormal speed.

Bastian’s right hand was touching the blade of Latreille’s

treasure sword, Arme Victoire Volonte.

It was a single edged sword.

If Bastian drew his dagger out, his right hand would be pierced by the blade.

He might be able to pull it out if he retreated… But Latreille might advance faster than him.

A sword and a dagger had their own pros and cons.

If Bastian was facing a normal sword, he could break it with a strike. However, the sword he was up against was a treasure sword that was also made with Tristei.

Cold sweat was breaking out from Bastian’s back.

“… Are you for real… Bro, were you that fast? Or did I turn slow?”

“I won’t show my full strength when I am merely training my brother that is 8 years my junior.”

— So he had been holding back all this while.

Creak, Bastian grit his teeth.

Latreille said:

“For the sake of the Empire’s future, I have the resolve to drink muddy water if I have to. And you? What can you do for the Empire? What can you do?”

“… Even I… am considering many things now. The people will be happy as long as the nation exists? Is that true? What needs to be done for the peasants born in this country to achieve happiness? Burdened with taxes, enduring the splurging by the nobles, are they really happy under such conditions? Don’t you think that is unfair?”

“It is unfair. And so?”

“What…!?”

“Your ideals are very shallow. You are talking about a fair nation? Can such a country maintain a powerful army? Can it nurture exemplary commanders? Who will lead the soldiers when barbarians and other nations attack? How will those who are pushing for liberalism protect the country?”

“There are exceptional talents even among the peasants.”

“It is foolish to depend on exceptional cases… Bloodline is a form of environment. The nobles receive education from a young age, those trending towards politics will learn to manage people and land. Those with a flair for military matters will learn to command massive armies. It is impossible for peasants to do the same.”

“I-In that case, just let the peasants receive education!?”

“Education requires time and money. No matter what era it is, it will never be enough. Even the Belgarian Empire couldn’t afford to provide education to all peasants. Which peasant would you offer this chance to? And how would you go about selecting that person?”

“……”

“If the chance for an education is only offered to a select group, then this would be no different from the aristocratic system.”

“Ugh…”

“Bastian, you looked down on your chance for an education in the past. Do you understand how much value it holds now? Then it isn’t too late for you to do so now. If you study hard, I

will prepare a post for you, be it ministers or generals… Just work hard for the sake of the Empire. If the country becomes prosperous, there would definitely be citizens that shall be saved.”

Latreille retracted his sword.

Bastian couldn’t say anything to refute.

“So you want me to accept injustice?”

“What I mean is that this is better than being destroyed by other countries. I am happy that you are interested in politics. I can forgive you if you are just stating your ideals. But if you get in my way, then you are my enemy. I won’t show mercy if that is true.”

“Cough…”

After Latreille left, Franziska and company could finally step out from the shadow of the pillar.

“H-Hello…”

Hm? Oh, it’s you. Ah, you saw that?”

“Ahaha… just a little…”

“Ara, my awkward side had been seen. Well, please keep this a secret alright?”

“O-Of course!”

Franziska nodded repeatedly.

“O-kay”, Martina raised both hands.

Jessica lowered her head courteously.

“… My apologies, and… Can I ask you for something?”

“What is it?”

“It isn’t good for us to intrude too long as guests. I hope you can write a job recommendation letter for us.”

“Have you contacted your acquaintance?”

She told such a lie earlier. Her true goal was to rescue her brother Gilbert from the Imperial Fourth Army.

“… I sent the letter, but that might not be reliable. I heard

that famous strategist will take part in the upcoming campaign… We would like to be servants and attend to his everyday needs.”

“Work as maids? Well, that’s fine.”

— Really, this prince is too innocent! So easily conned!

Franziska thought in her heart, but kept quiet to avoid unnecessary troubles.

Jessica curtsied and then lowered her head again.

“We would like to apologize for something… In the very beginning, we used aliases as we didn’t know the nature of your character yet.”

“Ahh, I see.”

“Yes… Our real names are actually—”

Jessica even made the effort to prepare handkerchiefs with fake names.

Bastian squatted down in front of Martina.

“I get it, I will write an introduction letter to where you would like to go. But she is still young, it would be better for her to stay here.”

“!?”

Franziska’s heart tensed.

She broke out in cold sweat.

Martina raised her hands up high.

“I understand! Martina will stay here!”

“Yeah.”

You can go wherever you want if there is a hostage, that’s what he meant.

— *To take a child as a hostage! This guy is truly a royal of Belgaria. I can’t let my guard down.*

Unlike Franziska who was very shaken, Jessica nodded calmly.

“… I understand, please take care of Martina.”

“Sis, is this really fine!?

“… Franziska, I understand you are reluctant to part, but it is impossible to bring a child onto the battlefield right? We should accept his kind offer and leave her here for now.”

“W-Will it be fine…?”

“This place is better than the battlefield of course. You understand right? Martina, don’t cause any trouble for others alright?”

“Okay—!”

Jessica wasn’t the type who would sacrifice her little sister to save her brother — Even though she believed that, Franziska couldn’t help worrying. If they could switch, she would rather be the one who stays.

Martina hugged Franziska.

“Sister~ Bon voyage!”

“…… Yes, I will definitely come back.”

Franziska hugged her petite body tightly.

Chapter 3 - The Battle of Grebauvar

Imperial Year 851 July 25th, 1330 hours——

The sun had already moved to the west, and afternoon training would begin after lunch was over.

The staff officers gathered in the First Army headquarters.

The three Knight Commanders and other commanders of infantry and artillery made up a total of 13. The commanders of logistics and medical aid were also present.

All the members were standing together closely as if they were squeezing into the picture frame and awaited orders.

They were all looking at Field Marshall Latreille.

On his right was Germaine, to his left was Regis.

— Nervousness.

To be honest, Regis felt out of place standing there, as if he was alone.

Latreille looked at the staff officers one by one and announced:

“We will now begin the operation to rescue the captives from Grebauvar City”

“Ehh!?”

Most of the staff officers looked surprised.

Knight Commander Batteren standing at the very front raised his hand.

“Field Marshall, we are starting right now!?”

“Yes, is there anything you are not happy about?”

“No… It’s just that I heard it would be on the 26th…”

“Because the enemy seemed to have caught wind of our plans in the first battle. I am not questioning anyone’s loyalty, but I can’t be certain that there won’t be any leaks for the entire army.”

“Y-Yes Sir.”

“This is a battlefield. There might be some changes, but I am confident that we can still display the strength of our troops.”

“Ugh!! We will not let you down and do our best, Field Marshall Sir!”

Batteren glared at Regis for a moment, but still backed down.

He speculated that not telling the staff officers the real plan was Regis’ idea.

There might be spies after all.

There was a reason why the plan turned into a surprise attack.

And the troops felt tense because ‘today is the final battle’.

The camp felt quieter and stronger, and the meals were more luxurious…

The High Britannian commander was sharp, and might notice the slight change in atmosphere.

— *This time, we will seize the initiative.*

Germaine laid out the maps of the surrounding area.

And explained to Latreille in a tense voice.

“I will start the detailed briefing. The most important key point here is to follow the plan. If anyone acted on their own, the entire army might get wiped out.”

The staff officers started getting rowdy.

The Imperial First Army was the strongest, and only fought in an orthodox manner. A single misstep might lead to annihilation — They had never experienced such a battle before.

And they only learned the details of this plan for the first time now, so doubts and uneasiness appeared on the faces of the staff officers.

The elderly knight Olbas stroked his beard and said:

“Hmmm, this is… a rather bold strategy. Is Sir Auric the one who proposed it?”

All their gazes fell on Regis.

“… Yes, you are right.”

He had no choice but to admit it. He couldn’t keep silent.

Even though Olbas’ tone was calm, he didn’t hold back in the presence of Latreille and asked:

“I have never heard of such a plan before. Will it work?”

Even though Olbas was the one who raised the query, from the looks of unease on the faces of the staff officers, this was something they wanted to know too.

Even Latreille didn’t want to interject here. If he covered for Regis too much, it would give the negative impression that he values the new strategist over the old one.

— *No matter how reputable Latreille may be, this is a battlefield. A place that will decide one’s life. And not just the lives of the staff officers themselves, but also their subordinates’ lives too.*

In Altina’s Fourth Army, Regis could fall back on the results he achieved so far and get by with the words ‘please believe me’.

Regis pondered.

“… If you couldn’t trust me no matter what, then let that unit withdraw from this plan. If a majority of the units refuse to take part, then this plan would be forced to be suspended… And we will lose the chance to rescue the captives.”

“I see. However, whether Sir Auric’s plan is reliable and if we should carry out the captives rescue plan are two different matters.”

As expected of the staff officer of the First Army, he responded with keen insight.

It might be easy to seal off his rebuttal, but a forceful reply might result in the field commanders not following the plan in earnest. Trust was necessary for this plan.

He suddenly remembered a phrase — not something he read, but something he heard.

‘Since I am asking you to fight for me, then it is only natural for me to bet my own life too.’

That was what Altina said.

Regis said softly.

“… In order to save lives, we should risk our own life, correct?”

“Oh? If the plan fails, you will forfeit your life? Do you have the resolve to be beheaded if the battle is lost?”

“Yes, that much is fine with me.”

Regis himself was surprised by how firm he was.

Losing his head if he fails — Normally, one should be afraid after hearing that. And they would tremble, break out in cold sweat, their heart racing, their voice trembling or something to that effect.

But he felt calm.

He thought it was strange too, no resistance or hesitation, Regis just accepted it like that.

Not just Olbas, even the staff officers around them widened their eyes in surprise.

“Not a metaphor, you will really lose your life, you

understand?”

“… Well… I planned many reckless battles so far, and risked the lives of plenty of soldiers… And there were times when the citizens would have fallen into danger if it failed. That applies to the plan this time too. For such an important matter… there is nothing to hesitate about in betting my own life.”

Before he realized it, he already had the resolve to bet his own life if the plan fails.

— He had really experienced many reckless battles.

Olbas held his breath.

Then fell on one knee.

With his head lowered deeply.

“My deep apologies for my probing questions. As expected of the strategist who grasped victory in countless cruel battles… So betting your life on the plan is a natural thing?”

“Ah, no, I don’t want to die either, my goal is for the plan to succeed…”

“If you can forgive my insolence, please allow me to

participate in this plan!”

“The pleasure is mine. I will be in your care.”

The other staff officers didn’t raise any objections either.

After earning their trust, Regis sighed in relief.

Latreille smiled.

“… As I thought, Sir Regis is not suitable to be a Third Grade Admin Officer.”

“Ehh? So Fifth Grade Admin Officer is more fitting after all?”

“Fufu… You have the makings of a general.”

“… Huh?”

“Alright, let’s leave that for after the battle. The people imprisoned in Grebauvar City are still waiting. I will cut to the chase, from here onwards—”

Latreille drew his sword.

The silver blade of ‘Arme Victoire Volonte’ glimmered, reflecting the figures of the staff officers like a mirror.

“— Victory will be ours!”

The staff officers raised their fists high and shouted.

When the sun went further to the west, the war horn was sounded.

The Belgarian Imperial First Army advanced.

Resupply from the capital also arrived, their infantry now numbered 12,000. The 2,000 artillery troops and 30 artillery pieces were situated in the middle.

Two knight bands secured either flanks. They were led by Olbas and Batteren, with a thousand riders each.

The headquarters were defended by one thousand knights of the White Wolves, and 3,000 infantry was placed to the rear as reserves.

The 50,000 pioneers were already enacting the plan as scheduled.

Grebauvar City was in a valley. As the Imperial forces had the

high ground, Regis could see the entire battle field.

Even though the staff officers with Latreille at the lead all rode horses, Regis stood to one side as he couldn’t ride.

He took out a pocket watch to check the time.

14:05 hours—

“… It is almost time to launch an attack at the fortress side. This is a feint attack to draw the attention of the enemy so the rescue operation can proceed smoothly.”

Germaine pointed to the fortress.

“The enemy is coming out!”

“Ho… Things are suddenly different than expected.”

According to their prediction, the enemy should be hiding behind the walls for a defensive battle. After all, they won by doing so the first time, and should continue to do that.

But Regis remained calm.

“… There’s no problem, this much is still ‘an opening I know’,

and I already conveyed the instructions to all the commanders.”

“Hmm.”

Germaine was puzzled.

“Doesn’t the situation seem strange? The soldiers at the very front ranks of the enemy…”

His vision appeared to be excellent.

Or rather, Regis’ eyes were weak. He couldn’t see that much detail.

Instead of that, the important thing was the time. Regis took out his pocket watch and checked it again.

“… It is time.”

The artillery manned by the soldiers spat out flames and smoke.

A moment later—

A shockwave that felt like a wall hit him. Not just his

eardrums, he could feel the sound with his entire body.

All the cannons fired.

The ground was shaking.

At the same time, a loud noise rumbled behind Regis.

That was the sound of the mechanism churning.

— *It will be a huge problem if it doesn’t work properly.*

After that, the First Army started their assault. They needed to attract the enemy’s attention.

“The enemy before us are made up of High Britannia and Langobalt forces, with each contributing half the numbers. There are about 20,000.”

Latreille nodded.

“They have rifles of the new model and the advantage in numbers. If they fought properly on the plains, they would be able to achieve victory quicker. This must be what they’re thinking, what a vigourous way of using troops.”

— They left the sturdy fortress for such a middling advantage? They must have other schemes in mind.

The distance between the two forces shortened.

The High Britannian forces with the advantage in range attacked first.

There was no way around that.

The new rifles of the Imperial Army — The Fusil 851 had just finished the prototype stage, and it would need some time before mass production begins. It might be ready next year, but it was impossible to garner enough numbers to be used in this battle.

Both forces continued to converge.

Huh, Germaine tilted his head.

“Why aren’t we shooting?”

“Our forces haven’t started firing?”

“I think we should be in range…”

Only one side was attacking. Not just Latreille and his staff officers, the other troops were also getting rowdy from confusion.

“Reporting! Reporting!”

A rider charged over, and leapt off his horse before Latreille.

He went down on one knee.

“The enemies are holding captives before them! Those bastards are using the citizens as human shields!”

“What!?”

The crimson in Latreille’s eyes deepened.

Regis felt his stomach heating up.

— They are actually using such a tactic!

Germaine spat out in disgust:

“Unscrupulous! Is this something the head of a nation would actually do!?”

The new Queen of High Britannia was traveling with her army.

The plan of letting one’s subordinate become a suicide bomber was cruel, but using citizens as shields would definitely be criticized by the surrounding nations.

Germaine continued shouting.

“The front is in chaos! Your Highness, we should retreat—”

“No! The mechanism had started! No matter what, we have to hold the line!”

However, if they couldn’t fight back, it wasn’t so much a battle line but an execution field for the Imperial soldiers.

The enemy already held the advantage in numbers and equipment.

In this expedition, the attackers were assaulting the enemy who had more troops and was defending a fortress — That was how reckless this fight was. If they reacted too slow, the results would be fatal.

One night… No, if he had one hour to think, Regis might be able to formulate a perfect response.

But if they didn’t make a snap decision now, the battle would be lost.

— I don’t know if it will be effective, should we let the unit detour? The enemy’s level of training is low. And they are encumbered with prisoners who didn’t have the will to fight, so it will be impossible for them to change formation swiftly. A detour to loosen the enemy formation and charge with cavalry…

Regis was thinking about a countermeasure.

But before the plan took shape —Latreille issued his orders.

“Engage the enemy! We don’t have any way to save the citizens being used as human shields!”

Regis shut his mouth and stopped himself from saying anything.

Latreille’s decision could lower the unit’s losses. If they avoid a frontal engagement, they would lose more soldiers than expected.

— More importantly, canceling the order will throw the

frontlines into chaos.

Several messengers had already sprinted off.

At the same time, the smoke signal for a charge was raised.

With the wind’s direction in mind, the smoke signal flares were positioned to the west of headquarters, and were kept burning.

By adding gunpowder, they could produce different colored smoke.

Shortly afterwards, the frontline units began their counterattack.

Countless gunshots sounded out.

The infantry charged.

The Empire weren’t idiots and had thought of ways to counter the rifles. Troops with sturdy shields were positioned in the front ranks to minimize damage.

But even so, they couldn’t block the rounds completely. As they drew closer, the bullets would be able to penetrate

armor, and it became impossible to use shields thick enough to protect the entire body. Such bulky shields were impossible for normal people to carry to begin with.

Soon they managed to close the distance and the pikes could finally show some results. However, their current situation wasn’t much different from the Seventh Army’s defeat.

The battle was more dire than expected.

Latreille issued an order.

“Left flank — send Batteren’s White Hare knights out! Attack the enemy’s right flank, destroy their rifle formation!”

“Prince Latreille, doing that will expose them into the fortress’ cannon range!?”

Even though Germaine gave his opinion, he didn’t ask for the orders to be retracted.

“The enemy knows that too, so they will be wary of our right flank. We can’t defeat the enemy if we don’t do the unexpected. It won’t be so easy for cannons to hit our cavalry!”

“Yes Sir!”

A messenger was sent, and a new smoke signal was raised.

Even though the smoke signals were faster, a messenger could pass on detailed orders. They used both units earnestly.

— This was how the First Army fought.

The commander Latreille would direct the forces, and his adjutant Germaine would raise any queries.

There were no clashes of opinions.

In a corner of the headquarters, Regis muttered:

“… Doing the unexpected is a very orthodox way of fighting though.”

The White Hare Knights on the left flank advanced.

However, the charging cavalry suddenly lost their balance which made them fall off their horses on an open plain.

— There were traps.

Latreille Immediately ordered.

“Damn it! Left flank, stop the advance!”

Unfortunately, it would take some time to change the smoke signal colours, in addition, it would be a while before the frontline that had fallen into chaos noticed his orders.

Germaine groaned.

“Ugh… It’s as if they had seen through our plans. They’re as fearsome as before…”

Using the captured citizens as human shields to seize the initiative of the battle, and setting traps in the possible attack routes.

They probably dug it out at night. It didn’t cause too much damage, but it made it difficult for the cavalry to launch a charge now.

At this moment, the two armies collided and engaged in melee battle.

The shield and rifle combination remained an effective way of

fighting. If things remained like this, they would end up just like the Seventh Army.

Regis told Latreille who was on horseback.

“Field Marshall Sir, please pull the left flank further back.”

“What?”

“What do you have in mind, Sir Regis?”

Germaine asked— but after pondering for a moment, Latreille made his decision immediately.

“Alright, let us see how Sir Regis uses his troops. Relay the orders to Batteren!”

Wasting time on explanations might lower the chances of success. Latreille was open minded enough to not doubt the people under him.

Regis started to explain his plans.

“The White Hare Knights are to go around the central infantry unit and move even further to the right of the right flank. After charging up the slopes, they should attempt to move to

the enemy’s rear. It would be great if they could seize that position, but they must not force themselves if the enemy takes countermeasures.”

“Yes Sir!”

The messengers of the First Army were excellent as well.

They conveyed the orders with amazing speed and accuracy, so the knights began their move.

14:28 hours—

The sky was still bright.

If night falls, they wouldn’t be able to see the enemy and it would be difficult to even relay the commands to the units. The smoke signals couldn't be used by then. They could still depend on the moonlight, but not for large scale warfare.

Although it was possible to launch a surprise assault with a small elite force…

They have to conclude the battle before the sun sets.

The wind from the mountain top grew stronger.

The White Hare Knights passed behind the formation’s back, and moved to the right side of the right flank, attempting to seize the enemy’s rear.

To counter this, the enemy’s left flank changed their directions.

Regis nodded.

“… The formation of the enemy in front of our right flank is in disarray.”

The right flank was Olbas’ White Tiger Knights.

They used this chance to charge.

As expected of them.

Just like they foresaw, there were traps placed as well, but since the knights were already expecting these, it didn’t faze them.

Germaine cried out excitedly.

“We got into the enemy’s left flank! They must be

Langobalt’s knights. They seem to be a good unit, but they won’t last long against the combined effort of the White Tiger and White Hare Knights!”

Latreille nodded.

“Yes, that was beautiful.”

“Oh… The enemy is retreating!”

“Pursue them! But don’t be too hasty, there’s no telling what kind of traps there would be.”

“Understood! Relay the orders to maintain cautious pursuit.”

With their main forces being suppressed all this while, the headquarters turned lively after a successful attack on the enemy. The heavy atmosphere was swept away, and spirited cries erupted everywhere.

Latreille dismounted.

And stood besides Regis.

“As expected of Sir Regis, you found out that the enemy’s weakness was their left flank.”

“…No, if I had to say, the ones who failed to respond correctly was the enemy’s right flank.”

“Oh?”

“Even if they couldn’t match the White Hare’s movement, the least they could do in response to our change in formation is to mimic us and flank around on our left side.”

“Indeed, if the enemy’s right flank had advanced, they would have broken through the sides of our central unit.”

“… That’s right.”

And of course, Regis had thought of a way to deal with that, but that wasn’t necessary now.

Latreille overlooked the battlefield.

“Hmm… Now that I think about it, the level of training for the High Britannians is quite low. On top of that, the units from Langobalt Kingdom are mixed in too. If they receive the orders to attack our left flank, it would be difficult for them to work in concert with their central unit — Were you aiming for this?”

“That is so. A unit with fresh recruits mixed in could fight unexpectedly well. But if you want them to move laterally or change the direction of their advance, their formation would crumble mid way.”

That was how the Fourth Army was, so this was something Regis experienced.

Because of their inexperience, the Mercenary King even broke into their headquarters.

Although they were saved by Altina’s duel…

Latreille sighed.

“The training level of the Imperial First Army is high, so I neglected the weakness of units with subpar training.”

He felt that being able to change direction and move as one unit was a given, so he couldn’t come up with a tactic that made use of such inadequacy.

Regis didn’t like commanding units with low level of training either, but that experience had prove useful.

“… It’s great that things proceeded smoothly.”

‘Yes, a splendid tactic that could only be used by a strategist with plentiful experience.”

“Eh? Ah, alright… Erm, thank you for the compliment.”

Plentiful experiences and whatnots were too high a praise.

But no matter what, this was the first tactic that Regis formulated by drawing on his personal experience, instead of referencing something written in books. But Regis could think of numerous books with similar strategies written in them too. The fingers on both hands wouldn’t be enough to count the stories with tactics on this level.

However, this tactic was based on Regis’ experience.

If he didn’t have the experience of a strategist, he might have proposed another tactic, or maybe drew a blank.

— Was he used to it now?

An adjutant couldn't remain on horseback when his lord had dismounted — Germaine dismounted too.

“The enemy has reorganized themselves, the frontline is at a deadlock.”

“They have superior numbers after all. Things are going well if we fought them to a draw.”

‘Yes Sir! Sir Regis’ tactic was brilliant!”

Germaine didn’t hold back in his praises. It made Regis feel a little embarrassed.

Regis looked towards the river.

‘… The water level… had fallen a lot.”

“Hmm, the enemy haven’t noticed yet?’

Germaine squinted and looked towards the fortress.

“Yes— They are not reacting, so they probably haven’t noticed yet."

Regis looked at his pocket watch.

It wasn’t 1500 hours yet.

“… I hope we can stall for another hour.”

“Yes, the frontline is at an impasse… but things are just stabilizing, it isn’t enough to draw their complete attention. I wish there is something else.”

And that thing came from an unexpected direction.

Four columns of smoke rose from the mountains to the east.

The colours were white, black, purple and red.

Latreille felt baffled.

“Is that the enemy’s smoke signals? They actually sent them from deep within the mountains?”

“Scouts, reconnaissance!” Germaine issued the orders quickly.

Regis pondered.

Smoke signals were raised from the headquarters to relay information to the frontline units.

Or they could be a means for sentries at the edges to convey

intel to headquarters.

However, what could the smoke rising from the mountains to the east mean?

At least, that wasn’t arranged by the Imperial forces.

If that was an ambush by the enemy, they wouldn’t expose their position, and there was no value in deploying troops at that spot.

“… The headquarters of a third party?”

“What!?”

When he heard what Regis mumbled, Latreille reacted immediately.

“… Ahh… Well, after eliminating the impossible, it is more appropriate to think of that as an order from a headquarters.”

It was possible that those weren’t smoke signals, but it was hard to imagine four columns of different colour smoke appearing coincidentally. Moreover, at such a timing.

“Sir Regis, are you saying that an army had placed their

headquarters in that mountain? Is that the reason they raised a smoke signal there… However, where are the troops receiving the orders? That would be the crucial question. Could they be behind our formation?”

“If it was a sneak attack, they wouldn’t do something that will rouse our guard.”

“That is true.”

“And we have deployed our reconnaissance network fully, even if a new enemy appears to our rear, we could react to them.”

“Hmm… What about the pioneers?”

“They will send reports if they are attacked. There have been no delays in their periodical reports, so they should be fine.”

“Why have they issued such an order, and just where are the units receiving the command…?”

It was unnerving.

“A part of the enemy has detached themselves!”

Germaine pointed to the battlefield and shouted.

Regis and Latreille shifted their gazes back to the front lines.

It was a part of the enemy’s central unit. They were moving away slowly.

In the first place, being abandoned by an ally in the heat of the battle was a serious situation. On top of that, the ones leaving were the elites, and the repercussion could be seen immediately.

Just like a column of a building being pulled out, the whole formation collapses.

The enemy’s central unit was in chaos, and the Imperial Forces pushed in.

Latreille crossed his arms.

“I see, so the smoke signal just now was the reason behind this situation?”

“A revolt? From the equipment on the soldiers leaving, that is probably a mercenary brigade…”

“Mercenaries huh. It is normal for mercenaries to run away when the battle turns sour…”

“Don’t you find it strange?”

“Yes… It is strange. The enemy didn’t show any decisive disadvantages. From the fact that the fortress had not fallen, this could be considered an advantage. Mercenaries can earn a bonus even if they fought battles where they have the advantage. On the other hand, their reputation would fall if they deserted midway. Just leaving the formation will be enough to decide a battle, that was common.”

Regis mumbled to himself:

‘… Or maybe… Someone noticed my plan?”

“What!?”

‘… I am not sure how much they found out… Instead of ‘the Imperial Forces will prevail’, their thoughts are closer to ‘Our side will be wiped out’. If that isn’t so, it is too unnatural for the mercenaries to desert at this juncture.”

Their reputation would plunge, and in the worst case, they would lose jobs.

Latreille tilted his head in confusion.

“Sir Regis, do you think the commander of the mercenaries sent those smoke signals?”

“… That is just my speculation.”

Germaine chipped in:

“In either case, the scouts are headed over there.”

But that would be too optimistic.

“… If the smoke signals are an order for the mercenaries to retreat, they won’t gather at the place where the smoke was coming from correct? After all, that position is now known to both armies.”

“Hmm…”

Regis watches the battle and gave a suggestion.

“Field Marshall, please give the order to not push in too deep.”

“I already issued that order before the battle started… Seemed like some units can’t restrain themselves. After all, the High Britannians used unscrupulous methods on us several times already.”

In the past when the First Army’s headquarters were attacked, there was that incident where someone hid in a gunpowder barrel as a suicide bomber. This time, they encountered the inhumane tactic of using captured citizens as human shields, and many of their brethren in arms were lost.

So it was natural for the soldiers to be extra motivated.

It wouldn’t be a problem if they could win this way-…

“… Field Marshall, I think the enemy have reinforcements. Please prepare our forces immediately.”

“What!?”

Latreille looked to the distance.

But didn’t see any signs of reinforcements.

Germaine was puzzled too.

“Sir Regis, where will the reinforcement come from? From the fortress?”

“No, the direction of the enemy’s retreat is strange. They are not moving towards the fort, but simply backing away.”

“Lord Germaine, the soldiers will run to the safest place when they flee… And that is normally the fortress.”

“But there aren’t any signs of reinforcement. If we issue the order to be cautious, we will be criticized for being cowardly.”

Germaine pointed out accusingly.

This situation was familiar. Regis’ proposal was rejected.

And so far, Regis had always backed down.

— *No! If I act weak as usual, I will commit the same mistakes!*

Regis didn’t give in.

“Please reconsider it. It will be too late when the reinforcement shows up.”

“But, Sir Regis…”

After hearing both their arguments, Latreille issued his order.

“The enemy is showing signs of reinforcements! Stop the pursuit and prepare to engage them!”

“Ugh!? Your Highness Latreille…!?”

Germaine looked as if he had taken a huge blow. Because instead of his advice, Regis’ proposal was accepted.

In that case, if the enemy reinforcement didn’t appear, it won’t end so simply with just Regis’ position becoming more precautions…

Regrettably, his ominous prediction came true.

To the north—

Downstream of the river, enemy units appeared from the direction of Langobalt Kingdom.

The cavalry was kicking up dust from their charge.

Latreille clicked his tongue.

“Reinforcement from Langobalt huh. That is why they left the fortress and fought on the plains.”

The enemy formation that was crumbling because of the desertion of the mercenaries was reorganized because the Imperial Forces didn’t keep up their pursuit.

Regis won’t back down anymore.

“Field Marshall, please order the units to rotate clockwise.”

“What do you…”

Germaine shut his mouth right after he was about to question Regis. He probably realized that he shouldn’t interrupt Regis’ tactics.

Latreille nodded.

“Fine, I will leave it in your hands for now.”

It has been half an hour since Regis said he wanted another hour more.

Latreille meant that he would leave the command of the

army to Regis in the time that remains, before the real operation begins.

Regis’ clenched fists were sweaty.

“… Yes Sir.”

It was finally time for him to command the First Army. What a heavy responsibility.

At this juncture, even if he lacked self-confidence, he couldn’t refuse.

Regis started issuing orders one after another.

“The White Hare Knights are to move clockwise. They are to move at high speed, so the other units would look as if they were moving counter clockwise, and return to their original position in the left flank.”

“The enemy’s right flank would fall into disarray because of the direction change. The 12th infantry are to assault the enemy right flank. But don’t go too deep, be ready to pull back at a moment’s notice.”

“The White Hare Knights are to attack in concert, supporting

the withdrawal of the infantry. If the enemy cavalry rushes to their collapsing right flank, both units are to withdraw immediately at that point.”

“Immediately after, the White Tiger Knights are to charge the enemy left flank after their cavalry has left for support their right flank. The 1st to 3rd infantry are to attack in unison.”

“At that moment, the enemy general will ignore both flanks and attack with their central unit. The 4th to 10th infantry are to continue moving clockwise, while the 11th to 18th infantry are to move counter clockwise to evade the enemy —then launch a pincer attack on the enemy’s main forces that are protruding out. But don’t push too hard, it will be fine for them to breakthrough. The time would be up by then.”

On the vast battlefield, no matter how formidable the first Army was, it still took more than 5 minutes to relay the orders.

It was impossible to convey such complicated orders with smoke signals.

Not just Latreille and Germaine, even the messenger couldn’t understand the orders. After all, the instructions given by Regis didn’t match the situation before them.

Should he be stopped…?

However, Latreille gave his silent consent.

The combined forces of High Britannia and Langobalt Kingdom—

The one who came out from the fortress with overall command was the new king of Langobalt, Paul Langschultz.

He was about 25 and looked capable, he was still young.

Paul was infatuated with the new queen of High Britannia — Margaret Steelart.

Because she said ‘just defending a fortress is boring’, he personally came out from the fortress to battle on the plains.

This was completely unrelated to her pulling up her skirt to reveal her legs when she said that — at least Paul thought he wasn’t influenced by that.

“Ohh! I have been waiting! They are finally here, Ricks!!”

He raised a hand towards the knights that came as

reinforcements.

The troops around him erupted in cheers too.

Their morale that had fallen earlier because of their slow responses against the enemy’s knights and the desertion of the mercenaries had recovered.

“Alright, the real battle starts now! Kill all the Galians! Rifle units forward!”

Even though Paul was a strict and by the book person, he was open minded enough to accept the advancement in technology.

He had even implemented the use of High Britannia’s new rifles into his strategies.

The Belgarian Empire didn’t have such high performance rifles.

They could only charge like feral beasts.

Weaken the charging enemy with rifles, and breaking the enemy formation with the charge of the cavalry reinforcement to the enemy’s flank — That was what he

planned.

Paul would usually make the right calls. It was true that this would maximize the results with the smallest losses.

But a gloom covered the face of the king.

“What?!”

The enemy unit was moving to his left.

— They are not charging?

The Imperial forces were shifting their formation clockwise.

“Hmmp, they want to detour to the side and attack. Trivial tricks!”

The left flank was broken through after they have done the same method earlier, and the lack of coordination with the central unit resulted in the left flank’s formation collapsing.

Paul issued an order.

“Relay the order to Ricks! Reinforce the left flank!”

The knights that went to support were different from the poorly trained soldiers of High Britannia. They were a unit that could fight on par against the knights of Belgaria.

And in response to the changes in the enemy formation, the rifle unit also shifted position. Even though their movement were more sluggish, they managed to change their position on the even plains. On the other hand, the Imperial forces were making a huge detour, and even ran up the slopes.

— We can handle this.

“Hm!?”

“Your Majesty! An Imperial Knights unit is coming from the opposite direction!”

“I see it, I get it!”

From the banners, that was the White Hare Knights, the unit originally positioned on the enemy’s left flank.

— Damn it, running left and right restlessly!

“Let the right flank deal with them! Recall the rifle units!”

The orders were relayed speedily.

However, the movements of the riflemen units carrying rifles and shields that were as heavy as lumps of steel were more sluggish than normal infantry.

On top of that, after they ran on the command to ‘shift formation to the left’, they received the orders to return to the right.

The idea of going back had a very heavy toll mentally.

Their physical fatigue was already accumulating, and after receiving such an instruction, their movement turned more dull. They weren’t horses that could run all day, but humans that would complain.

Paul’s adjutant screamed:

“The enemy infantry is attacking!”

“What!? At a time like this!?”

It was as if they knew about the chaotic situation in the right flank, a part of the Imperial infantry closed in.

— *Was I seen though? Not just my plans to recall the rifle unit to engage the White Hare Knights, but the fact that the formation would be a mess at such a time?*

“Hmmp, too naive! Our formation won’t crumble with just that! Get Ricks to go around to the right flank!”

This was the right decision for the elite knights that came from their home country.

The Belgarian knights were fast and formidable. For the High Britannian riflemen with subpar training, it was difficult for them to handle the knights that moves extremely fast on the battlefield.

But it won’t be a problem for Ricks’ knights to engage them.

As for the battle between the infantry, Paul planned to use the power of the rifles to achieve victory.

— We can win!!

Paul imagined his victorious pose when he present the news of victory to the High Britannia’s Queen.

— However, the cries of battle came from an unexpected

direction.

It wasn’t from the right flank where Ricks’ knights were heading, but the left flank where he had just drawn away the knights, which was under attack.

— *Did they see through that I would send the reinforcements to the right flank!?*

They wouldn’t be able to act this quickly if they issued the order after seeing Paul’s unit moving.

Even if the commander on horseback saw a weak point, they will still need time to relay the orders to the soldiers.

Judging from the current situation, the enemy commander already gave the order before Paul did.

“No, that is impossible…”

Not only did they saw through his plans, and also predicted that timing very accurately.

“… Impossible, this is just a coincidence.”

However, the fact remains that his left flank was being

attacked by the enemy. As the knights reinforcing them had been drawn away, they were in danger of collapsing.

“Ugh… I am the King of Langobalt, Paul Langschultz! If the enemy increased the ferocity of their attack on both flanks, then the middle would be weakened! Break through the center of the enemy!”

He drew his sword and thrust it forward.

The soldiers who were panicking roared.

The orders were relayed, the horns were sounded and the charge began.

“Wargghhhhh—! Vorstoβ—!”

The enemy before them parted to the left and right as if they had agreed to this beforehand.

The mostly unharmed enemy seized the position to their sides.

This could only be done by issuing the orders to move before Paul gave his command.

“Ugghhhh… I-Impossible… Impossible!”

“Your Majesty! We are being attacked from both sides!”

“I said I know that!!”

Since just now, all the plans he came up was on point and should be effective for the situation. But at the same time, the enemy countered his orders perfectly.

A nightmare.

The flanks of his main forces were exposed.

His troops kept falling.

And their target was gone. The soldiers probably think ‘since a charge was ordered, the enemy should be in front of them’.

But the soldiers in massive formation don’t have a clear view of the situation like the commanders on horseback. They could only follow orders blindly as if their eyes were covered.

Paul moaned.

“Ugh… How was the attack seen through…!?”

In the end, there wasn’t a single chance for the rifle unit to aim and fire a volley.

Even though there were still some enemies before them, it was completely different from the time he issued the order. They were toyed by the speed of the Imperial cavalry and its movement.

Also, as if his army was offering itself, they weakened the direction facing the enemy and exposed their flanks.

… *What is happening? It’s as if the enemy saw through what I was thinking?*

“Ugh… The commander of the Imperial Army… I heard he is the new Emperor, but to such an extent…”

Or maybe he had an extraordinary strategist.

His staff officers asked:

‘Your Majesty, what should we do!? We are taking heavy losses, there is nothing to gain from fighting on here!”

“Imbecile! You want to retreat!? We have superior numbers, and even used the new rifles from High Britannia, and you

want me to run away after being toyed with!?”

“B-But…”

“This battle is being watched by all the neighboring nations!? You want the reputation of Langobalt to wipe the floor!? Have you lost your nerves!?”

“No, m-my apologies!”

Paul appointed young officers with similar mindsets as his staff officers. Hence, even though they were united, but there wasn’t any old experienced soldier who could teach them the correct time to withdraw.

*

“W-What… exactly is going on…?”

Germaine was more surprised than the enemy general.

Latreille also opened his eyes wide.

“Why? Why are you able to predict the enemy’s movement so accurately? Could it be that your title is more than meets the eye… You are a real ‘Wizard’?”

Regis scratched his head.

“No… Well… From the banners, the enemy commander should be the King of Langobalt right?”

“That’s right.”

They could see the banner of the Langobalt Kingdom flying in the center of the enemy formation.

But they didn’t know about his capability as a commander. Langobalt didn’t have many records of battles with Belgaria, and he might have a strategist with him.

“… Well, it doesn’t matter if it was the King or his adjutant that is directing the battle… The enemy commander is very faithful to the fundamentals of warfare, and is the type with great learning skills. We also know that the level of training of their messengers is high, so it is very easy to predict his actions.”

“Huh? The personality of the commander? How do you know that?”

“… Well— … Before the enemy reinforcement arrived— We

moved the White Hare Knights from the left flank to the further right side of the right flank, and then attacked the enemy’s left flank right?”

“Yes.”

“From that assault and the reorganization of their formation afterwards… The King of Langobalt… Or his strategist… is someone who adheres to the fundamentals of tactics rather strictly, and is the type who will reflect strongly on his failures. Also, we can grasp the training level of their messengers from that.”

“I understand when you explain it like this… But it’s not quite clear why I should call that characteristic as a bad thing?”

“… From the perspective of his movements being easily read, it couldn’t be considered a good characteristic. The fierce attack of the White Hare Knights left a deep impression on the enemy commander. And so, he would use the most dependable unit to engage them. Which means, he would definitely dispatch the fresh knights corp that had just arrived to counter.”

“That much is predictable.”

Latreille nodded.

Regis continued:

“… And so, the left flank that was organized under the pretext that this knights corps would be there would fall into disarray.”

“How did you grasp the timing?”

“Because this was a repeat of the first order. How fast would the White Hare Knights respond to the orders of taking a detour and how long would it take for the enemy to react. I already saw it once.”

“They would move in exactly the same way?”

“… If it was just one or two person, the margin of error would be quite large. But if it is the movement of a large group of people, there would be surprisingly little difference when repeating the same actions.”

Even though Latreille couldn’t really accept this, he couldn’t think of any specific examples to refute that. He then changed his question.

“I understand the reason why the left flank would be a mess. Then why did the enemy attack the center of our formation instead of reinforcing the left flank?”

“Ahh, that was the result of ‘strongly reflecting on failures’. The first time, the left flank collapsed because he reacted too late. The second time, he sent the knights with the fastest speed in response, but it resulted in the left flank crumbling. In that case, he won’t use the same tactic. Similarly, he most probably won’t use the idea of ‘sending another unit to shadow the opponent’.”

Latreille pondered.

“So that’s the reason. Didn’t Sir Regis mention that ‘all it takes is the will of a single man’? How could you tell that the enemy won’t act unexpectedly on a whim?’

“Yes… If that happened, our preparation to attack would have become useless. Using pierre, papier, ciseaux (rock, paper, scissors) as a metaphor, this would be like the enemy choosing pierre(rock) or papier(paper). We just need to choose papier, so the worst that could happen would be a match nul (draw).”

If the enemy commander could understand this much and

was capable of formulating a plan to counter the Imperial’s action, he would have already done so.

Regis shrugged.

“Well… Simply put, the enemy commander is too straight forward, that’s all.”

When Latreille and Germaine heard that, they looked speechless.

Regis was a bit anxious. When the plan worked and he explained the reasons behind it, Altina, Jerome and the others all looked glad and impressed. But Latreille’s reaction was very different from them.

— Surprise? Didn’t seem to be that either.

In truth, the two of them felt ‘fear’. However, Regis evaluated himself lowly as usual and didn’t notice.

As if he remembered something, Regis looked at his watch.

“… It is a little different from what we planned… but it is time.”

Just as planned. The dam upstream cut off the water flow, and the appearance of the river changed. There was almost no water in the river bed right now.

And of course, it was the same for the moat around the city.

The waterway was also devoid of water, revealing a path.

Even if the people couldn’t dive underwater for extended periods like Third Grade Combat Officer Vallis, it wouldn’t be an issue.

A hole that could accommodate numerous people to pass through at the same time opened in the walls covering the steel production street.

Chapter 4 - Felicia of the Steel Production Street

1600 hours—

The sun was setting to the west, near the mountains. The sky was still bright, but the vicinity of the city was already covered by the shadows of the mountains, making it dim.

The water level had been decreasing since several days ago — Some people bring that up in their everyday conversation.

The captured citizens were living in harsh conditions. Most of them didn’t care how much water there was. They couldn’t even be sure if they would live till the next day.

“It’s true! The water! It’s gone!”

The person who was peeking out the window from the second story of the building—

A burly skinhead wearing an eyepatch, the man had a scar on his face which made him look like the bandit's boss shouted.

He was the guild master of the steel production guild.

The one who leads the captured citizens.

Vallis who was beside him nodded.

“I already told you, this plan was a direct order from Field Marshall Allen de Latreille and proposed by the strategist Regis d’Auric. There are no plans in the Imperial Army that are more certain.”

“Woahhhh—!! What Mr Soldier said is true! Hey everyone! Let’s go! Let’s go!”

The guild master instructed immediately.

Those who were confident in their running speed dashed out from the buildings.

Putting those who are slow in front would slow down the entire group, but these people were also serving as scouts.

For example, if the enemy took notice of this plan, then the exit of the waterway would be rained upon by countless bullets.

— Were they noticed?

That was the only thing Vallis wasn’t sure of.

He was certainly confident of his running speed. However, he had a more important mission, and that was to protect the escapees together with the guild master.

Everyone prayed in their hearts.

— *Please don’t let the enemy notice.*

...Gun shots!

Gunfire lit the walls. The red flash that robbed others of their lives spread in the dusk light.

“It’s no good!?”

The one who groaned was Fel.

However, the guild master refuted that:

“No! They are just sentries guarding the waterway! It’s not that easy for a rifle or two to hit! Everyone, we have to bet on that! Go! Go! Go! Run while you can! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!”

“Warrrgghhh!!” x3

With a roar, a group of citizens dashed out from the shadow of the building.

A group of men was in front.

They ran very fast.

Next were women, and men who brought women.

And at the rear were those with children and others who chose to bring their belongings no matter what.

It would be ideal if the sequence was reversed, but they might be wiped out instead.

And this was a matter of life and death — There were those who wanted to flee even if they had to push aside the slower ones in front of them.

Because of this, compared to the ones shot by the High Britannian sentries, many more had fallen and got trampled by the others.

Even though there was no water in the waterway, there was still mud which made it easier to slip.

A large number of people slipped and fell down.

Despite that, the number of captives that had escaped was many times more than those who died in the dried waterway.

On the second story of a building that was facing the waterway—

The steel production guild master carried his bags.

“I should get going.”

“… It isn’t over, but we are close to succeeding. It’s all thanks to your aid that we can rescue most of the captives. Thank you for your cooperation.”

“Don’t say that. If Mr Soldier didn’t bring us this information, we probably wouldn’t have noticed that the waterway is dry. Even if we did, we might have just gawked at each other.”

“I am just carrying out my mission.”

“That’s why I said that everyone is grateful. Hey, is that really

fine?”

“This is part of my mission.”

“I see. Don’t die on me, Mr Soldier!”

“… Of course. Thank you for lending me this good lance.”

In Vallis’ hands was a completely black lance. Only the lance’s tip had a silvery gleam.

It was a lance made from new steel.

“Hah, I was right to hide it in advance.”

The guild master laughed. Although it made him look like a bandit leader who successfully got his prey.

He ran downstairs.

And left the building with his waiting subordinates.

A person tugged at Vallis’ sleeve, it was Fel.

“Aren’t you going?”

‘I should be asking you, hurry up and go. Run along with the women and children.”

“I can’t leave you behind. I agreed to help you okay?”

‘Stupid… The battle is already…”

“It’s not over, you just said that.”

Fufu, Fel laughed. Even though she was still a kid, there was an indescribable beauty about her. A nostalgic smile Vallis had seen somewhere before.

Strangely, Vallis didn’t think about forcing her to leave.

Or rather, staying with her made him feel more at ease.

“… You really are a helpless girl. You have to place your own survival as the top priority. Try your best not to leave my side.”

“Yes!”

The sounds of hooves hitting the road echoed and drew close.

As expected — after finding out that the captives had escaped, the cavalry stationed in the steel production street rushed on scene.

They were few in numbers, but many would die if they caught up to the captives.

— *I can’t ignore this!*

There were 8 riders that gave chase.

Vallis decided to get the last rider first.

“Fel, close your eyes and mouth. Don’t move.”

“Ehh?”

Vallis grabbed her waist with his left arm.

And stepped onto the ledge of the 2nd story window.

“We are going!”

“~~~~~~!?”

She covered her mouth to stop herself from screaming.

Vallis leaped out of the window.

“Heh!!”

Twisting in midair, he thrust his 42PA (320cm) long lance out.

Even though it was dark, he still pierced the throat of the rider accurately. After pushing him off the horse, Vallis got onto the empty saddle.

The horse neighed, it was going to fall!

Vallis twisted his body and managed to keep his balance.

“Steady! Steady!”

“Ahwahhh…”

“Fel, grab the mane!”

Vallis held the lance with his right arm and put Fel who was in his left arm onto the back of the horse — Letting her sit in front of him. She grabbed onto the head of the horse.

With his free left hand, he grabbed the reins. He got back the

balance of the staggering horse.

“— Alright!”

He squeezed the belly of the horse. As he had fallen far behind the riders in pursuit, he had to catch up fast.

Even though this rider rode at the very back, the soldier might be mediocre, but the horse wasn’t bad.

Vallis excelled in horsemanship too.

— *In the first place, there isn’t anyone in the Imperial First Army that is weaker than a rider from Britannia!*

The horse probably sensed that the rider’s skill was good, and started galloping.

“Good girl!”

He caught up.

The High Britannian riders were cautiously descending into the waterway.

One of the horsemen turned back.

“Hey, you are finally here! That’s slow—”

The thing that finished the sentence was the head flying off.

Vallis charged down the waterway on horseback.

With man and horse working as one, he landed on the ground with soft mud, allowing him to keep his stance.

He twirled his lance.

This was something the steel production guild master risked his life to hide. The enemy’s head flew off with just a glancing blow.

Vallis used plenty of weapons before, but this was the first time he wielded such a blade. It wasn’t the appropriate time and place, but he was still moved.

The horsemen pursuing the captives didn’t think they were being hunted too.

In an instant, three horsemen were killed.

But it seemed that the first four had gone deep into the

waterway.

“Are you alright, Fel!?”

“Don’t mind me! Get them!”

“Right!”

Vallis spurred his horse on.

The captives were fleeing in the mud.

The place that was once a river had dried up.

— This is just like wizardry.

Even Vallis who was told the details of the plan couldn’t help opening his eyes wide.

The High Britannian soldiers shot with their rifles from the walls of the steel production street.

There weren’t many of them, but if they aimed at the dense crowd, they would hit someone.

The citizens were also being pursued by riders, who were

killing many with their lances.

“Warrghhh! Galian pigs! Is running all you can do!?”

“Ahh!”

“Wahh!”

These were the citizens carrying bags and holding children. They couldn’t defend against the riders and their lances.

But the riders never imagined that the most dangerous presence on this battlefield was coming from behind them.

“Warrrghhhhhh——!!”

The fight only lasted an instant.

No, it couldn’t be called a fight. In just the span of one breath, the three riders who were hunting the citizens were dead.

“Eh—!?”

The remaining horseman rode onto the slope of the river bed and escaped.

— His priority right now was to defend the citizens.

“Hmm!?”

Vallis could hear the sound of hooves.

A lot of cavalries charged down the river bed that didn’t have any water.

Vallis clicked his tongue.

“Langobalts soldiers huh!?”

He braced his lance.

The cavalry that arrived — numbered more than 20. Their total number was probably 5 times that.

About a hundred horsemen were pursuing the escaping civilians.

And right now, the only one capable of fighting here was Vallis.

— *This isn’t a number I can defeat.*

He had already braced himself.

During these 5 days, he had kept his tension high. And right now, the high strung string finally snapped.

“… This is the end huh… This isn’t too bad of a place to die.”

“What, are you giving up!? Vallis, you have to live on!”

“Fel!? Sorry about dragging you into this…”

“We made a promise right!? You will protect me, and kill all of them! You have to protect me! If, if… I don’t want Vallis to die too!”

Could it be, this child followed me because she thought this might happen? She knew I would become the shield to protect the citizens? To stop me from throwing myself away?

Normally, he had to escape in order to survive. That was the situation right now.

Discarding the heavy lance and overtaking the escaping citizens, then the two of them would probably be saved.

— However, Fel probably didn’t wish for such a retarded method.

Vallis held his lance tightly.

“I’m sorry that you have to do this together with me… And of course, I will protect you. I will live on. After all, I haven’t wiped out the enemy yet.”

“Yes! E-Erm… Vallis.”

“What is it?”

“D-Do your best!”

“… Of course!”

More than a hundred horsemen charged at him—

Vallis spurred his horse.

And braced his lance.

“I am Third Grade Combat Officer Jean Ulysse de Vallis of the Imperial First Army! You shall not pass!”

He had probably defeated 10 horsemen.

He was stabbed in the sides once and hit on the head, suffering a slight concussion.

He wanted to give up several times.

But when the sight of Fel’s figure appeared in his field of vision, an emotion he himself didn’t understand welled up, and his body carried on fighting.

“Warrgghhhh—!!”

He stabbed another rider.

An angry roar sounded out.

“Arghhh! The opponent is just one horseman, what are you lots doing! Surround him and thrust from all directions!”

“Lord Ricks, it’s dangerous! Please stay back!”

It was a knight in golden full plate armor.

— *The knight commander? I will defeat him!*

There was a good chance that a unit will retreat after losing their commander. Even though that would be dependent on the capability of the deputy…

Pleading the exhausted horse to go forth, he charged ahead once more.

He then touched the petite back of the girl grabbing the head of the horse lightly.

“… Hah… Hah… Fel… Are you still alive? Just a bit more… Hold on.”

No answer.

Did she die from being too close to the intense battles?

Even though he felt uneasy, Vallis could still feel the warmth of her body with his hand.

— Still alive.

His reason of being right now was to protect this girl from harm. That’s what Vallis thought.

All he ever had was nonstop missions. But now, he could feel

a motivation he had never felt before.

“Charge!!”

Vallis squeezed the belly of his horse.

And charged at the man named Ricks.

His adversary sneered.

“Fufufu… There isn’t anything easier than seeing through the actions of a desperate opponent.”

“What!?”

“When forced into a desperate situation, they will charge the enemy commander on sight. They don’t have any other choice!”

He was tricked.

The horsemen were ready and thrust their lance. They were aiming for his horse.

He didn’t even know the name of the horse.

But it was the horse that fought the most bravely among the horses Vallis had rode.

It neighed, and fell with foam at its mouth. Its body was pierced by three lances.

Vallis was thrown onto the ground.

Mud splattered.

Even though he could lift the lance, his legs and waist were at its limits with just a shiver.

“Fel, are you alright!?”

“Ughh… Yes… Nghh…”

“!?”

She held her slender waist and collapsed onto the mud.

Red.

Fresh red blood.

Fel’s fresh red blood was…

Soaking the belly of her clothes.

A Lance? Or a rifle? When was she hurt! I didn’t even notice!

During the battle, there were several times when his consciousness was blurry. And during those moments, he failed to protect her!?

“... Erm... Ugh... Please... Vallis... Please don’t die...”

“What are you saying. Such... such a thing... Fel, no! Don’t die! I won’t allow it! Don’t die!”

His vision was a blur.

He didn’t even notice that his tears were falling.

Vallis thought about it before. Thought countless times. How would he be like the moment he dies.

Shot by arrows? Turned dull in the midst of battle? He detested dying of illness in the warzone, but that was rather common too.

But he never imagined.

He would be holding a child covered in blood, and that he would be bawling even though the enemy was right before him. So this was his last moment in life.

“Fel! Don’t die! Don’t die! Please… Don’t die… Please…”

Why, just why was this child such an important existence to him. He couldn’t understand.

Even Vallis couldn’t explain it clearly.

But he couldn’t stop his outburst of emotions. When he thought that Fel might die, Vallis couldn’t even hold his lance properly.

Ricks commanded:

“Hurry up and end him!”

The Langobalt horsemen readied their lances.

Numerous lances thrust towards Vallis.

“Hyaaaa——!!”

The sound of hooves came from upstream of the dried riverbed.

They numbered 800!

Charging at the very front was the young knight commander of the White Hare Knights, Batteren.

“Ahhhhh!! Send those Langobalt bastards flying!”

“What !? Tch!”

Ricks turned his horse hurriedly.

The mud splattered.

“Too slow!”

Batteren threw his lance. It passed through the gaps between the guards on horseback and pierced Ricks from the back.

“Gyaaa!?”

“Ahhh, Lord Ricks!”

With the commander dead, the horsemen fell into confusion.

The Langobalt horsemen weren’t weaklings and would continue slaughtering the captives without their leader. But right now, they were being hunted by the Belgarian knights that outnumbered them several folds and fell into disarray immediately.

Vallis trembled as he held Fel tightly.

He didn’t have the strength to even stand.

He just kept crying.

A chestnut horse stopped by his side.

“Hey, you… From that uniform, you are a High Britannian soldier?”

Batteren was questioning a man who was holding a child that didn’t look Belgarian and bawling his eyes out.

Vallis raised his head with tears in his eyes.

“S… Save her… Please save her… Fel, she…”

“Hmm? Could it be, Vallis!? What happened to you!?”

In Batteren’s impression, the man known as Vallis was someone who was born to be a soldier.

Is she his family? Did she live in Grebauvar city? Batteren thought. That Vallis he knew looked much more emotional now.

Batteren pointed upstream of the river.

“Take her away! The doctor is here!”

“… Eh?”

“That strategist didn’t leave the doctor at the headquarters, but sent him here instead. That child is still breathing, and if she is lucky, she might be saved.”

To be frank, Batteren detested Regis.

But he had to acknowledge him now.

— *He even foresaw such a situation?*

Vallis shook off his tears and roared:

“Wo… Wo… Wooooahhhh!”

He stood up.

His legs weren’t trembling anymore.

And ran through the mud.

“Woooahhhhh! Doctor——!!”

At that moment the Vallis whose face was red, sniveling with tears and running while covered in mud was the coolest— The one who said that was Felicia who survived after that.

Chapter 5 - Turbid Waters

1700 hours—

The sun had already set behind the mountains. The shadows of the soldiers were also stretched out on the ground.

At the Imperial forces headquarters.

A young messenger saluted.

Although he gritted his teeth to suppress his feelings, his eyes were sparkling, cheeks red, and his voice was a pitch higher because of excitement.

“The White Hare Knights are escorting the citizens who were once captives in the steel production streets of Grebauvar! They are disengaging from the front lines as planned— I-It’s a success!”

Wahh! The soldiers cheered.

Even though the battle wasn’t over, there were already people shouting “Vive l’empire!”

That was how exhilarating the results were. It was more difficult than retaking the fortress city.

And before this report, the Imperial soldiers saw the brilliant command that stumped the enemy commander, so it had evolved into a celebration as if victory was assured.

Even though the fortress was unharmed, and more than half the enemy was still standing.

Latreille and Germaine were silent. Maybe they didn’t think of this as their merit.

The other staff officers were the same.

After seeing Regis showing his true strength through his command, all of them were at a loss for words.

Latreille who received the report nodded lightly.

He wasn’t smiling.

“... I am sorry about this, but there is no time to be gleeful about this. Gentlemen, now would be the most crucial phase of the battle. One wrong move, and it will become the

greatest defeat in Imperial history. Everyone please be mindful and don’t make any mistake.”

The relaxed atmosphere tensed up immediately.

Even though Latreille meant to only hand the command to Regis for the remaining 30 minutes— But after the citizens started their escape, Regis continued holding on to the command authority.

“… White Hare Knights advance to the center. But minimize your losses. If the enemy congregates, it is fine to withdraw.”

“Please wait a moment!”

“Huh?”

“Lord Batteren is too busy. Pleases leave this mission to us!”

The one who named himself and stepped forward was the commander of the White Wolves Knights Corps that was standing by at headquarters— Zemmourt.

He was a young knight, about 25 years old, just like Batteren.

Regis thought about it.

In April earlier this year—

On the founding day festival, relations between Altina and Latreille soured. During that time, the Beilschmidt border regiment had a skirmish with the White Wolves.

Because of Regis' scheme, their former commander and half of their comrades fell in that battle.

In this battlefield, the ones who hate Regis the most wasn't the enemy, but the survivors of the White Wolves.

Even though Latreille delegated command authority to Regis, he wondered if they would follow Regis' instructions faithfully.

Because of this feeling of unease, Regis left them at headquarters as escorts.

Zemmourt closed one eye. This man was emitting an aura befitting a commanding officer of the Empire.

"If we watch idly as this intense battle ends, we will lose our standings after returning to the capital. Can you grant us the chance to reclaim our honor and trust?"

“… There is no time so I will be direct… Will you obey my orders?”

“Fufu, seems like Sir Strategist has some misunderstanding about the current White Wolves. Do you think we are that vengeful?”

“… Aren’t you?”

“Half the unit died means that half the unit won't know the grudges of the past. Including me, half of the soldiers who just joined the unit were transferred from the south.”

Regis had read such a report before.

This meant that Zemmourt didn’t bore any personal grudges, and was trustworthy.

However, it was easy for emotions to trend towards negativity.

“… If I was in Zemmourt’s position… I would feel the need to do something to gain the trust of the old soldiers that comprises half the unit.”

Zemmourt shrugged.

“What you said is true. However, from the same perspective, this is also a chance to show everyone that we will follow Sir Strategist’s orders.”

There was no time to continue their conversation.

Batteren was exhausted, this was an undeniable fact. Both men and horses were at their limit. It would be great if he could leave it to the Zemmourt.

Regis stopped his thoughts.

“… If you disobey the orders, we might get wiped out.”

“I understand.”

Zemmourt lowered his head deeply as if he was before a general.

Regis turned and met the eyes of Latreille who was standing behind him.

Latreille nodded without a word.

He probably meant that he would leave it to Regis.

— *Is he testing my abilities?*

Regis adjusted his orders.

“Well then, the White Hare Knights are to standby to the rear. The White Wolves would advance towards the middle. In order to cover the retreat of the other units, please draw the attention of the enemy. But only until 1800 hours. Understand, once it is 1800 hours, no matter how the situation is, you have to retreat immediately.”

“Yes Sir!”

Zemmourt stood at attention and saluted.

With the White Wolves that were committed into battle mid way as the anchor, the frontline was built up again.

As the sun was going to set, the opponent didn’t attack forcefully.

— If this goes on, it will proceed just as planned.

No problem.

It should be.

Regis received the reports from the various units and found the battle to be progressing smoothly.

At the same time, he felt something was out of place.

“… Colonel Oswald Coulthard… Didn’t use any schemes, and simply handed his forces over to the King of Langobalt… That’s all?”

Hah! Regis opened his eyes wide and turned his head.

“Field Marshall, please lend me some men!”

Latreille asked confusedly.

“Hmm? Is something wrong?”

“If my predictions are correct, there is still time!”

“I won’t turn you down now. What is the objective, and what sort of troops do you need?”

“Cavalry! I just need 100 cavalries…!!”

However, the White Wolves had set off for the front lines.

The White Tigers are holding the battle lines. They couldn’t be dispatched.

So they could only use the exhausted White Hares that had retreated to the rear…

Latreille nodded.

“100 cavalries. If that’s all, my guards would suffice.”

“Ehh!? But they are supposed to protect…”

“And of course, I will be going too. If Sir Regis wants to squeeze out a hundred cavalry in such a situation, then I think your plans are valuable enough— how about it?”

Regs hesitated a moment, then nodded immediately.

‘Please do! It’s very urgent!”

Latreille leaped onto his war horse.

“Well then, follow me Sir Regis! Tell me the details on the horse!”

“Ehh!? Ah, erm… Yes…”

He was surprised, but still reached his hand out — His hand was grabbed and pulled up forcefully. He was seated behind Latreille.

“Hyaah!?”

He almost fell off, so Regis hugged Latreille without even thinking.

But Latreille didn’t seem to be mad.

The horses Regis rode would thrash about wildly… But Latreille controlled the horse and made it still like a statue. As expected of the best horse in the Empire.

Latreille gave the orders.

“Germaine! I will leave this place to you!”

“Yes Sir!’

He answered with a salute.

In moments like this, the relationship between Latreille and Germaine was completely different from Altina and Regis. For them, it was only natural to act separately in order to fulfill their own responsibilities when needed.

But Altina wanted to stay with Regis as much as possible. If Regis went out of her sight, she would feel very uneasy.

— *As soldiers, the two of them are probably acting the right way.*

Regis pointed to the fortress.

“Field Marshall, please head into the northwest forest!”

“Hmm… Going around the battlefield huh… If the enemy noticed us, this 100 cavalries won’t be able to do anything. Then speed is of the essence. Escort unit, move out! Those who are slow will be left behind!”

The knights all answered with a loud roar.

The Langobalt Army—

“Your Majesty, the White Wolves Knights are moving out from the Imperial headquarters!”

“They are committing their reserves huh. Seems like they can’t spare the effort anymore.”

Even though the deft movements of the Imperial forces put him at a big disadvantage, Paul slowly reorganized his units after using all his wits.

The ability to unite the soldiers that had been defeated, such abilities were far from stupidity.

In the first place, they had the advantage in numbers and equipment, and also the support of cannons from the fort.

“Hmmp… It was a bit of a tough fight… But it would be fine if we defeat the enemy in the end.”

If he could achieve the results he wanted, the process didn’t matter.

— *Well, I was hoping to present a flawless victory to Margaret in the beginning.*

The Langobalt Kingdom had a low evaluation of the High Britannian Army. Even though they had new rifles, the soldiers were still weaklings.

Leaving aside naval battles where the performance of the ships mattered the most, the High Britannians weren’t much on land battles.

This was a fact. In this battle, their low level of training resulted in them being unable to keep up with the movement of the Imperial forces, and the formation became chaotic several times.

As for why the Imperial forces lost to the High Britannians so many times, Paul thought the reason was ‘the Empire has grown weak’.

If he had the advantage in numbers, Paul was confident that he could turn the situation into a one sided slaughter.

But the truth was, he got fooled by the Empire’s strategist, and all his plans were countered.

Even though his main forces were intact, his overall forces had fallen quite a bit.

— On top of that, the captives had escaped.

He glanced to the river.

Because the river suddenly dried up, the waterway became an avenue to escape.

There weren’t many sentries.

His adjutant tilted his head.

“Why did the river dried up all of a sudden in this season?”

“Let the scholars study that in the future. It is too inefficient for soldiers who aren’t experts to think about it.”

“Yes Sir.”

To be honest, Paul felt something was amiss.

However, in his mind, his duty was to command the army and defeat the enemy.

As he was faithful to his duties, he focused his energy on the situation before him and expelled everything outside the battlefield from his mind.

He never imagined that the trap set by the Imperial army was upstream all this while.

A messenger ran over.

“Reporting! Reporting!”

“What is it!?”

“Ughhh… Knight commander Ricks has been killed in combat! By the White Hare Knights!”

“… What!? Is it confirmed!?”

“After leading a hundred or so horsemen to pursue the escaping captives, he engaged the White Hare Knights shortly after.”

“Moron!”

No matter what the reason was, the commander of the unit shouldn’t be exposed on the battlefield.

Paul gritted his teeth.

“The rest of the cavalry are supporting the right flank under the command of his deputy.”

“What about the enemy! The ones that killed Ricks!?”

“They escaped in the direction of the Imperial territory together with the captives!”

Which meant that their mission was to protect the fleeing captives.

His adjutant proposed:

“My liege, as the combat prowess of the knight reinforcement are weakened, we are having a harder time holding up. Please give the orders to retreat back to the fortress!”

“Don’t be retarded! Now is a good chance! Not only did the White Hare Knights charged left and right on the battlefield, they even went to escort the escaping captives. No matter how exemplary the Imperial cavalry are, the stamina of their horses should be at their limits!”

The White Tiger Knights who had been roaming the battlefield to support the battle lines were also exhausted and their movements had slowed down.

Even though they worked with the infantry ranks to switch back and forth in order to rest, they had charged numerous

times and expended a lot of their stamina.

— *What is left is the White Wolves Knight that had finally moved out. I heard they are just a subpar knight corp with half of them being fresh recruits.*

Paul roared:

“This is the moment of victory! Send out all the people in the fort! Even the High Britannians! The enemy used up all their forces! If we press them now, we will win!”

He still had more than 10,000 troops that were unscathed.

Paul laughed:

“Kuku… To exhaust one’s forces before sunset… The enemy commander just knows a little street smarts! A commander of an army needs to see the battle in much longer terms!”

He looked towards the western sky.

The sun was near the mountains. But it was still far from it setting completely.

It would be another two hours before nightfall.

“We can win! Yes we can!”

With the reinforcement from the fort, the Langobalt and High Britannian forces strengthened their attack.

Even though the Empire committed the White Wolves, there wasn’t anything special about their movements.

— *As expected, the unfathomable way of my plans being countered as they unfold is just a fluke.*

Paul concluded.

He couldn’t imagine that the man who commanded so amazingly had left headquarters for other matters. After all, that went too far against common sense, so it was natural that he couldn’t predict that.

There wasn’t any need for special instructions now — He never imagined that was what his adversary thought.

17:55 hours—

His adjutant shouted.

“The White Wolves are falling back! So are the other units!

The front lines of the Imperial forces are collapsing!”

“Alright—! Pursue them! We will ravage the headquarters of the Imperial Army in one go!”

The entire army received the orders to charge.

Paul felt that victory was at hand.

The ground was shaking.

In the beginning, he thought it was caused by the charge of his own army, but that wasn’t so.

He heard a thunder-like sound from a certain direction.

The soldiers panicked, and looked around them.

Paul also surveyed the surroundings.

“What happened?”

“… I-I don’t know.”

His adjutant said in a trembling voice.

Paul looked towards the Empire.

“They are running up the hills?”

As a fundamental of battles, the ones who have the higher ground holds the advantage. However, there were limits to this. Even if they deploy on such steep slopes that they couldn’t form ranks properly, it would just tire the troops needlessly.

It would be fine if they were just defending, but their movements would be dull if they switched to the offensive. And it would be hard to coordinate with their allies.

“… They are… not forming up?”

The unfathomable noise was getting louder.

He then remembered suddenly.

Weren’t those signs that a flood was coming?

When he noticed the sound of water, he could already see the flood of water washing brown grass and mud coming at him.

The troops wailed.

There was no meaning in ordering a retreat.

The army lost their cohesiveness immediately and the soldiers scattered. But where should they run? Most of the troops ran in the direction of the fort.

But they were close enough to see the flood. It was probably impossible for the soldiers in armor to escape.

The smarter ones ran for the slopes.

The west of the battle field was now a dried river bed. A place that would be flooded very soon.

And the only place they could escape to was the eastern slopes.

However, the Imperial forces had secured that position before hand.

Those who were both lucky and calm escape up the empty slope where the Imperial bullets couldn’t reach. However, they numbered less than one tenth the total number.

Paul pulled his reins.

“Run!”

“Ah, Your Majesty, where to!? We should run to the slopes—”

“To the fort!”

“W-Why!?”

“How could I abandon Margaret!?”

The soldiers under him were engulfed by the water.

— *This is actually a trap!*

The river dried up, and the prisoners escaped as if they knew this ahead of time.

On top of that, the action taken by the Imperial forces before him.

And this flood.

Were all this set up by the enemy?

“Ughh… Can such a thing… be done by men!?”

The horses were swept by the torrent and fell like twigs.

Soldiers wearing armor sunk.

Innumerable screams were overwhelmed by the immense flood.

Just the water was a big threat, but there were logs and stones mixed in too. Armor and lanes were all useless now. Aside from running at full speed to escape, there was nothing else they could do.

“Your Majesty!”

His adjutant caught up in no time.

“Ohh! You made it!”

“As expected, just this amount of water can’t drown the valley!’

Turning back, he could see that compared to the eruption earlier, the water flow had stabilized.

The water overflowed the river banks, and the city was probably the same with the water gushing out from the waterway. This was really terrible.

“What a horrible sight. But, if the fortress is intact…”

“As long as the cavalry survives…!!”

“Ohh!”

They lost a lot of men, but a sizable number of cavalry capable of fighting rushed over.

Paul grabbed his reins tight.

His body was trembling.

“A… Alright! With the cavalry as the core, if we consolidate all the surviving soldiers, we can still fight! How can we bend down to those Imperials!”

“Yes Sir!”

“First, I have to check on Margaret’s safety!”

The adjutant frowned resignedly, but nodded.

“… Yes, in order to command the High Britannian troops, that is necessary.”

Paul made his adjutant wait and walked into the private chambers of the queen, located in the depths of the fortress.

“… What is this?”

There were no guards.

There should be an adequate number of guards to protect the High Britannian Queen.

Because of the flood, the vicinity around the Grebauvar city became empty. Although the city part was flooded, the fortress portion shouldn’t be damaged too much.

“I can still fight. I can still fight… Margaret…”

He pushed open the door without even knocking.

There wasn’t anyone here.

Margaret and the High Brittanian strategist Oswald Coulthard were not here. Not just that, even the maids and guards were

missing.

“… What is going on? Margaret! Margaret! Where have you gone!? It’s me! Paul Langschultz!!”

This was the bed she would lie on even in the day, the Belgarian made couches she likes and the white tea set from the far east. Everything was the same before Paul went out to battle.

But only she alone wasn’t here.

“… Where… did you go?”

“Your Majesty!”

His adjutant came in.

How unsightly, Paul glared at him.

“What is it!? And this is the private chambers of a royalty!”

“… Not anymore.”

“What?”

“I questioned the maids who are left behind. She said the High Britannia Queen and her escorts had already left Grebauvar. They left via the west gate.”

“They actually!? When!?”

“… About an hour ago. When the captives were escaping.”

There was no doubt that during that time, the attention of the fortress garrison and the two armies fighting in the field was focusing on the captives.

No one noticed that at this moment, the High Britannia Queen had quietly slipped out from the west gate in the opposite direction.

Paul held his head.

“… How could it be… Is it because she saw me fighting an ugly battle!?”

“Didn't she plan to escape all this time? And the result is, no one is chasing the High Britannia Queen, but we are in a deep crisis.”

If he didn’t fight this battle, the Langobalt Kingdom would still

have the option of capturing the High Britannia Queen and using her as a negotiation chip with Belgaria.

At the very least, they could demand a Queen’s ransom from High Britannia.

However, the Belgarian Empire focused all their energy on the King of Langobalt, while the High Britannia Queen got away scot free!

Paul’s lips quivered.

“… What are you saying? Did Margaret… use me… as a sacrificial pawn?”

“I don’t know how she thinks, but that’s the situation right now. In the beginning, we used the citizens as shields… Thinking about it carefully, we won’t be able to negotiate peacefully because of that. And isn’t the one who suggested that Colonel Oswald?”

“Ughh…”

Normally, using the release of the captured city and prisoners as chips, one could request for a ransom.

However, if the scheme of using citizens as shields was used, it would be impossible for them to negotiate with the Empire.

After all, they wouldn’t be forgiven on an emotional level.

“We were too rash in taking this Grebauvar city that had not fallen for a long time. And didn’t the High Britannian Queen used this point exactly?”

Paul lowered his head.

“… No. We… just need to win. The fortress is still intact. The city is just being flooded momentarily, we can still fight!”

His adjutant showed a bitter expression.

No matter how he objected to his king, the only answer he got was to fight.

It was true that there was no possibility of a peaceful negotiation.

A soldier ran over. But it was the private quarters of an important person after all, so he stopped at the entrance.

“Reporting!”

“What’s the matter this time?”

Paul asked annoyingly.

The expression on the soldier’s face seemed to be saying that something troublesome was happening again.

His breathing was ragged probably because he sprinted here, and his face was pale.

“… The water…”

“You are telling me that now?’

“No, my liege! It isn’t a flash flood… the water level isn’t dropping.”

“What do you mean?”

“It seemed that the enemy built a dam downstream, and blocked the river flow.”

“A dam!? Why!? What is the Empire trying to do!?”

The soldier couldn’t answer.

The adjutant said in a tone as if he was groaning.

“Your Majesty, the Belgarian Empire… wants to flood Grebauvar city.”

“T-They are actually doing such a thing!?”

But of course, not the entire place would be flooded. The walls and the taller parts of the fortress were built rather high up.

However, if the water flooded one story high, they wouldn’t be able to use the city.

And facilities such as food storage, cellars and stables— were located on the first floor.

Paul’s face turned as pale as the soldier reporting.

“… Can we destroy the dam?”

“With the water reaching a certain level, the cavalry won’t be able to get close. Infantry would be able to approach from the slopes.”

“Yes.”

“However, our troops are…”

They lost more than half their soldiers in the flood earlier.

How many men were left? And even for those who survive, do they still have the will to fight?

“We will fight our way out!”

Paul decided.

“Don’t say anything more, just follow me! Just those who still have the will to fight is enough! This is the final battle!”

He descended the stairs of the fort.

Drawing out the sword at his waist, he shouted:

“The Belgarian Empire is on their last legs and is nothing to be afraid of! I am the King of Langobalt, Paul Langschultz!”

When he attempted to go down to the first level.

The water already flooded half the level.

It was up to his waist.

If they wore armor and rode on their horses, they would need to bet their lives on it. After all, falling off would mean drowning.

There was not a single knight armed and ready to go in sight.

Their horses were here, but they all sought refuge on the second story.

Paul took off his armor and threw it away.

He yelled.

He didn’t know why he was yelling as he waded to his horse and mounted it.

“Open the gates! The King is taking the field! All those with valor follow me!!”

“… Your Majesty.”

His adjutant who had also taken off his armor approached.

“Ohh! Get on your horse too!”

“… Your Majesty…”

“What’s the matter!? Mount your horse! Open the gates now!”

“…… Your Majesty…… The mechanism to open the gates had already been submerged in water.”

“Ughhh…”

“Let’s raise the white flag.”

His adjutant lowered his head and said.

Paul lifted his sword and slashed at the water.

“Uwahhhh~~~!!”

Chapter 6 – Miscalculation

Passing through a vineyard, they entered the forest.

This road that was covered sparsely by trees ran through several hills, leading all the way to west Langobalt.

Stones and dried branches were scattered on the ground, twisted roots formed cracks on the tough surface of the ground.

For normal knights, the legs of the horses would be pricked and they would fall easily. That’s how the road was.

However, as expected of the Belgaria Imperial First Army elite escort knights. They could move like the wind even on road conditions as terrible as this.

In the beginning, Regis was still worried.

— Is it fine for me to grab the Field Marshall Latreille, who is going to be the Emperor?

“Uwahh!?”

— *I’m going to fall! I’m going to fall!*

He felt it was terrifying when he rode on Altina’s horse… But that was nothing compared to this.

They maintained top speed.

And they were shaking intensely.

He couldn’t spare the effort to think. If he didn’t grab on tightly, he would fall.

If he fell onto the stone covered ground at this speed…

There were also many knights following behind. Will he fall to death, or get trampled to death?

There were several times when Regis felt that he couldn’t go on.

His hands were tired, and he was losing his grip.

— *Ughh… Is this… the end?*

When he was with Altina, he would sit in front of her most of the time. He could grab the head of the horse and hold on to its mane.

Although the horse might feel pain if he grabbed their mane.

As he was sitting behind, he could only hug onto Latreille tightly.

— *So big.*

Was it because of his armor? It made Latreille’s body feel larger and stronger than usual.

— *So this is… the man who will become Emperor?*

And this was an opponent he had to face.

Even though they were fighting on the same side now, once the Grebauvar campaign ends, Regis would revert back to his identity as Altina’s strategist.

Since their political ideals were in conflict, they would have to stand on opposite sides.

Klang! His body was airborne.

“Uwah!?”

His body was floating up, and almost fell off the back of the horse.

He held on for dear life.

Even though he wasn’t running, his heart was pounding wildly. He kept panting as his body shivered.

Latreille kept his eyes to the front and said:

“Don’t fall now, Sir Regis.”

“Uwah!”

“There are several roads to the west of the fortress. From the intelligence we have on hand, there are routes to Langobalt, West Langobalt, and to the sea through the mountains.”

Seemed like Latreille had memorized the map of the surrounding area.

As expected of him. Regis wish Altina could learn that too.

“So why did you think it’s this route? The direction of escape is…”

The Queen of High Britannia definitely escaped through here — Regis thought

“I-It must be this road leading to West Langobalt.”

“Why?”

“Only this road is wide enough for a carriage to pass through.”

“It’s true that the other routes are passable with horses, but not carriages. But what is going on here? They are using carriages?”

“Yes.”

“The queen needs to ride in a carriage? It’s difficult to understand. Even if the Queen can’t ride a horse, they could still bring her along anyway.”

“T-That’s right… But Queen Margaret must ride in a carriage.”

“Why are you so sure!?”

“During the battle with the Seventh Army, the Black Knights assaulted them from the rear. The headquarters where the Queen of High Britannia had been positioned was in grave danger. Despite such a situation… She still sat in a prominent black carriage.”

“Maybe it will be different this time.”

“No…”

“Her staff officers will suggest that she should escape on a horse!”

“… If she was a Queen that could accept such suggestions, she wouldn’t have followed the army on this campaign, or occupied Grebauvar city.”

“Maybe her personality changes frequently, and she will willingly get onto a horse.”

‘That, is impossible.”

“How can you be so certain!?”

“… Even if she wants to ride a horse out of stubbornness, the people around her won’t think so.”

“Hmm!?”

“… They will think she is so afraid of the Imperial Army that she abandoned her carriages during her escape… That’s why.”

“Her pride huh. But that doesn’t change the fact that she is fleeing?’

“If there is another goal, it can be called a different approach. For example, they had to attack Fort Bonaire even though the Imperial capital was right before them… It was the same for their retreat.”

Latreille turned silent.

Regis was conjecturing the personality of the High Britannia

Queen from past events.

She was someone who would never escape by herself on a carriage alone.

And if her staff officers could persuade the Queen, she wouldn’t have occupied Grebauvar city, but returned straight to High Britannia.

“If it is for her principles, it might be possible for her to stay in the fortress right? Even though the command authority is held by the King of Langobalt.”

“… If that is so, then our action this time will just be wasted.”

“Fu, you made me go so fast, only to return empty handed?

“The odds of capturing the Queen of High Britannia is equally high though?’

“That’s true.”

An earth shaking sound came from behind them.

Latreille merely glanced back for a moment.

“Hmm!? What happened!?”

“… That should be the activation of the final device.”

“Unleashing the flood? What kind of effect would it actually have? Is it really powerful enough to decide the battle?”

“… Probably.”

Regis only read about it from a book and was enacting this tactic for the very first time.

If the things recorded in the books were different from the real thing, maybe the amount of water held back by the dam won’t be enough to defeat the enemy completely.

And at that point, even though they have the high ground, the exhausted knights corps would probably have a hard fight before them.

That was why they built a wall downstream too.

If the water flooded the first level of the fort, it would be impossible for the enemy to hold on for long. So in the end, they could definitely take back Grebauvar.

A sharp whistle came from the front.

That was something used by the First Army.

“Found them!”

That was the whistle of the scouts who moved ahead.

Latreille spurred on his horse to go faster.

There was a right turn in front. The body of the horse tilted completely to the right, so far they even touched the branches to the side.

“… Uh!?”

Pip, the leaves hit Regis in the face.

He wanted to twist his body to the left out of fear, but he would probably lose his balance and fall if he did that, it was

very dangerous.

When he rode with Altina, she mentioned ‘Don’t move if you don’t want to die’.

Regis grit his teeth and steadied his body.

His field of vision widened.

In front of the narrow strait of road—

He could see the figure of soldiers who had their rifle at the ready.

It was the High Britannia riflemen!

Regis exhaled from shock and froze.

Latreille drew his sword.

“Break through!”

He sped up instead.

The knight escorts roared and charged after him.

At the same time, gunshots rang out.

“… Huff.”

His breathing was ragged.

Oswald Coulthard swung his blade.

The Imperial Knights were wearing armor. The sword went through the gap under the armpit and pierced his heart.

“Arghh!?”

The Belgarian Knight twisted, and fell off his horse.

Oswald pulled his reins and drew near the black carriage.

“Queen Margaret, please come this way!”

The High Britannian Queen was sitting in a light carriage for

two. It wasn’t a box type, but closer to a couch being covered on the sides and front, and wheels mounted onto it. It was small enough for a human to pull it, but a horse was drawing it. This was called a cabriolé, a two wheeled carriage drawn by one horse.

Queen Margaret Steelart curled her knees and sat on the couch.

She flicked her hair a little unhappily.

“Ara ara, Oswald, can you help me? My hair is a mess. Where did I leave my comb?”

“… My deepest apologies. Can the elegant Queen Margaret please bear with this?”

“You are always like this. Always. You are going to become Mr Fish again okay?’

“… I am very sorry… The knights that attacked us are probably scouts… I think their main forces are pursuing us.”

“Fufu… How troubling? Is this the end of the road?”

“It is just as the wise Queen Margaret says. Please ride on the horse over here!”

Margaret smiled.

She crossed her arms, pushing up her bountiful breasts. As her clothes were rather thin, the round shapes could be seen clearly.

“I refuse.”

“… I understand.”

Oswald backed down, he probably expected such an answer.

Normally, even if the two of them shared a ride, there was no telling that they could escape. That was how fast the Belgarian riders were.

Oswald wasn’t wearing armor, Margaret probably weighed less than the full plate armour worn by the Imperial horsemen.

However, the horses were different.

Even the best horse in Grebauvar couldn’t match the horses of his adversary.

Or rather, as expected of the Imperial First Army.

Gun reports rang out behind him.

This was the ambush team he deployed along the route firing.

— *They got here so fast.*

This was a mean of stalling for time. If this could stop the enemy, make them wary and advance slowly, maybe he could escape…

What little expectation Oswald had was shattered so simply.

The sound of the hooves drew near.

“… I know war doesn’t always go as we wish… But this is it. Everyone, please hold them back.”

They were being hunted, and it seemed he had braced himself for the fact that they couldn’t escape.

He couldn’t surrender.

If the horse that was running at full speed gets hit, it won’t end so easily with just a heavy injury. He couldn’t let Margaret take any risk.

And since he couldn’t escape, it would be better to issue an easy to accomplish task to the escorting guards.

Oswald issued one order after another quickly.

“The twenty soldiers behind get down from your horses and go into the forest! If anyone comes near Her Majesty, shoot him! But don’t shoot the enemy commander!”

The soldiers at the rear rank obeyed the order, dismounted and hid in the forest with their rifles.

“The soldiers further back are to form road blocks, three to a team! If you see any pursuing enemies, aim for the horse head!”

The heavy armored knights stood to the side. She was First Lieutenant Glenda Graham.

“Sir Oswald! I will buy us some time!”

“My deepest thanks, Glenda. But please don’t push yourself.”

“Yes Sir! But how did the Imperial forces notice us?”

When Oswald realized the scheme of the Belgarians, he

estimated the time when the citizens would escape, and use that chance to withdraw.

This should be the time when the enemy’s attention on the fortress was the weakest.

As they had travelled quite some distance before the enemy caught up, the chances of them noticing right at the start was low.

They only noticed after the fact.

And there were several routes to the west of the fortress.

Why did they notice that we picked this route? Or did they send soldiers down the other paths too?

— *If the pursuers are few in number, we can fend them off…*

The Imperial knights appeared behind them.

They were in a single file, so Oswald couldn’t tell their exact numbers. But from the sound of the hooves, there were quite a number, not just a dozen or two.

— Which meant the opponent saw through the fact that Oswald would choose this route.

It was going to be a melee battle.

The Imperial riders thrust out their lances.

“Hyaaahhhh——!!”

The guards started to engage.

The one shooting from on top of the horse was Glenda who was wearing heavy armour with several rifles on her back and on the horse.

“How can I let you bastards reach Sir Oswald!”

The bullet pierced the breastplate of the Imperial soldier.

He fell with a scream.

However, Imperial soldiers emerged from behind him one after another.

She shot the loaded rifle, dropping it after she fired and picked up another loaded rifle to shoot.

The bullets flew out.

And hit.

But the enemy didn’t stop.

The Belgarian horsemen weren’t stopping. They came closer and thrust their lances.

“Woahhhh—!!”

“Ugh…!?”

Glenda ditched her rifle and held a pike.

And thrust.

She dodged her opponent’s attack and thrust at the same time. Aiming for the side of the rider’s abdomen.

She hit!

“Gah… Glory to the Empire… Ah.”

With a slurred sound, he grabbed onto his enemy’s pike — Glenda’s pike. And from behind this man, another rider appeared.

— *I can’t pull the pike back!*

Glenda let go and drew the sword on her waist.

“Die!!”

She slashed.

She knocked away the Imperial soldier’s lance — and stabbed his throat — Or that was how it should be.

She hit the lance with enough force to break the sword, but her opponent’s lance kept thrusting at her.

The personal combat ability of the Imperial First Army was higher than Glenda expected.

“What!? … Guu!?”

The side of her abdomen was hot.

As if her organs were burning.

— *But I can still fight!*

She slashed at her opponent’s neck.

But her opponent was going far away from her.

“Eh?”

She finally noticed, it wasn't the enemy pulling away, she was the one who fell.

Her vision tumbled.

Glenda gripped her sword and fell to the ground. Head first.

A dull crunch came from her neck. She wouldn’t move ever again.

The Belgarian horsemen stepped over the fallen bodies and charged at the carriage where the High Britannia Queen was.

Latreille’s horse was in the middle of the formation.

Regis gave out instructions:

“There should be an ambush in the forest! Stop them from firing!”

Some of the riders dismounted and entered the forest.

Gun shots were fired.

Followed by death throes.

The soldiers ambushing in the forest were subdued quickly.

They just needed to capture the High Britannia Queen and the mission would be accomplished.

Even so, twenty Imperial soldiers still fell.

Latreille spurred his horse forth.

Onto the road in the forest.

The sun was about to set, and the surroundings were dark.

All the High Britannia troops hiding in the forest had been dealt with by the Belgarians.

With the advance and retreat path blocked, the High Britannians were completely surrounded.

In the middle of the encirclement was a black two wheeled carriage that appeared very high class. As the path ahead was blocked, it had stopped.

And before that carriage were the corpses of several Imperial soldiers.

One man was standing in front to protect the Queen.

“Huff… Puff…”

He even lost his horse.

His sword was full of chinks.

But that man was still standing.

He was the de facto commander of the High Britannian forces, Oswald Coulthard.

A faint smile was on his face.

Latreille rode forth from the midst of his knights.

He looked down from his horse.

“Fu… You actually defeated so many of my elite soldiers… Looks like High Britannia has excellent knights too.”

“… And you are the Field Marshall of the Belgarian Empire, Prince Allen Deux Latreille de Belgaria, correct?”

“Yes.”

“I am humbled by your presence. I am Colonel Oswald Coulthard of the High Britannian army.”

Regis was still seated behind Latreille.

He leaned to the side of Latreille and looked at Oswald.

— *So this is Colonel Oswald Coulthard.*

He was thinner than Regis imagined. He was about Regis’ height. Maybe it was his gentle smile, Regis couldn’t tell that he was that strong.

There was no doubt that he was an extraordinary swordsman.

Latreille nodded.

“Oswald Coulthard… I heard this name many times during this war. So you are the right hand man of Queen Margaret, and the de facto commander of the High Britannia forces?”

“… Preposterous. The perfect Queen Margaret doesn’t need any right hand man, and Her Majesty is not a soldier. And it is impossible for a mediocre person like myself to command an army.”

“Fu… Then who devised the numerous vicious schemes?”

“You are calling them vicious? On the battlefield, those with powerful sword and spears using strength and techniques to slaughter those weaker than them are undoubtedly just… But for the weak to devise plans to defeat one’s foe is wrong, inhumane and unscrupulous… Is that what your Highness wants to say?”

Even though Oswald paused often during his speech, he kept on going.

Latreille shrugged.

“I am not refuting the use of tactics. But forcing your subordinates to blow themselves up and using citizens as shields are too vicious.”

“In that case, issuing the orders to charge where people will definitely die, imposing heavy taxes where many will starve to death, what about them? Are they vicious?”

No matter what, both sides would result in casualty.

But Latreille answered unhesitantly.

“Wrong — Those who die in a charge were not good enough.

It was neither the training nor the talent, but they’re just not lucky enough. It’s the same for the citizens. The world isn’t so gentle that you can die happily on your deathbed if you work seriously. Farmers, merchants and soldiers are all the same… Doing all they can and squeezing all their wits to live on, but they couldn’t survive without luck. That was what living means — But issuing suicide missions to soldiers and holding captured citizens as shields, what else can you call it other that vicious?”

“I see… As expected of the brilliant Prince Allen de Latreille. I am convinced.”

“I answered your question though? So you should answer mine. Were you the one who devised all those unscrupulous tactics?”

Oswald nodded.

“It was all planned by me.”

“… Is that so. Your morales might be vague, but your brilliance does shine. It will be a pity to kill you here. Why not work for me?”

The soldiers around him were in an uproar.

It was rare to see someone recruiting the de facto commander of an enemy nation.

Oswald smiled faintly.

“… I am fortunate enough to serve Queen Margaret the glorious. It brings me the greatest joy, and I have never thought about letting this go.”

When they heard that name, Latreille and the other soldiers all cast their gaze behind Oswald.

The person sitting on the two wheeled carriage was Queen Margaret.

Such carriages should have attendants, but they have either abandoned the carriage and ran, or got killed in battle. In any case, Margaret was seated there alone.

After meeting the eyes of Latreille, Margaret tilted her head.

“Oh… You are like a young lion, Prince Latreille.”

“I am standing before you as the Field Marshall of the Belgarian Army, Queen of High Britannia.”

“Fufufu, what a frightening look. Are you going to kill me? I am about to be killed… How scary.”

“I would have ordered for the arrows to be loose if I wanted to kill you. I will imprison you. That way, the High Britannia Kingdom would be more inclined to negotiate.”

Margaret pouted.

“Ara ara, a great nation like Belgaria would do something like holding hostages? How small minded. I am disappointed.”

“Making a fool disappointed can be considered a compliment.”

“… A fool? Perchance, are you referring to me?’

“Compared to the surrounding countries, High Britannia possessed such overwhelming technological advantage. Despite holding such a good hand of cards, you ended up like this. You will go down on the list of foolish monarchs.”

“Fufufu… Ara, that’s right.”

“Surrender if you cherish your life. If you wish for an honorable death, I advise you to surrender instead. If I have to cross swords with you, I guarantee you will have a horrible

ending that befits your foolish ways.”

“… Pfft… Pfft ha… Ahahahahaha!”

Margaret laughed shrilly.

Why was she laughing?

Even Latreille was baffled.

“… What happened? Is she…? Has she gone mad?”

The knights took a step back as if they just saw a monster.

Regis muttered.

“No, she is just *névrose du narcissistic*.”

“Huh!?”

Latreille turned his head.

With the powerful Oswald before him, turning his head is really dangerous — Regis thought.

“Can I come down?”

With the help of the Knight escorts, Regis got down from Latreille’s horse.

He was just ten paces away from Oswald.

It was a bit far to hold a conversation, but when he thought about the fallen knights at his feet, Regis didn’t want to go closer.

“… Queen Margaret yearned to be a ‘special existence’. And is deeply convinced that she is ‘special’. I think that even in such a situation, you are still hoping sincerely to be ‘special’.”

He twisted his butt as he said that. Because of the intense ride for an hour, his butt felt a stinging pain.

Margaret smiled wryly and said:

“Fufufu… You said something interesting. Who are you?”

“… Nice to meet you. I am Fifth Grade Admin Officer Regis Auric—”

“He is the strategist Regis d’Auric.”

Latreille corrected him.

Regis scratched his head fearfully.

“Well… That’s my position. I am seconded temporarily to the First Army as the Fourth Army’s strategist.”

Oswald looked surprised.

Regis’ appearance must look surprising to him.

He was a famous strategist in the Empire after all, so Oswald was probably expecting a more imposing figure.

“I see… So it’s you… No wonder our escape route was seen through.”

“… Yes. By analyzing the personality of the High Britannia Queen, this would be the result.”

As the possibility that they escaped by other routes weren’t zero, several soldiers were dispatched down those paths too.

It appears they would be making an empty trip.

Margaret said very happily:

“Ara? Since this is the first time we met, what do you know about me?”

“… As your authority over High Britannia is strong enough to declare war on other states, I can deduce the character of the ruler from the country’s policies. On top of that, I could tell from the movement of the unit in this war too.”

“Oh, and so?”

“… The actions of Queen Margaret… thinks of herself as special, believes deeply that she is extraordinary, all these are based on her narcissism. The tendency of such a person is to speak in overconfident tones, and always seeking praises from others. For example, she would keep someone who always compliments her by her side.”

“……”

Margaret looked Oswald’s way.

Regis continued:

“As she is always seeking praise from others, she is not concerned with the feelings of others. She will easily think of extremist ideals and set unrealistic goals. — Using the forces of an island nation to attack the Empire that is the strongest of the continent.”

“Fufufu… How fascinating. Are you saying I have an illness?”

“Yes. In other words, Queen Margaret’s personality is a ‘common’ thing in the discussion of scholars. You just happen to be royalty.”

“… What did you say?”

The smile vanished from Margaret’s face for the first time.

Regis shrugged.

“Although research in this field is just beginning, it will take some years before such a branch of study is recognized.”

And if it is not acknowledged as academia, it won’t be widespread as a discipline among the nobles.

“Someone like me… is actually… common!?”

“Correct. However, even though this is an illness, it doesn’t require treatment… It’s just that your action, speech and values will have a certain tendency— just to that extent. The serious cases will have trouble in everyday life. It’s written in the books, for example, the symptoms include a huge gap in understanding the situation, or inability to hold a

conversation with others.”

Margaret averted her eyes.

“I’m thirsty. I want to have some tea.”

“… Eh?”

The topic changed suddenly.

She chuckled.

“I am tired of such long talks. This should be enough right? The conclusion has been reached.”

“...No, the conclusion isn’t out yet. Diverting your attention elsewhere in a middle of a conversation isn’t proof of a brilliant mind and quick wittedness. This is simply the lack of ability to think. As your thinking is too shallow, you won’t be able to discover new ideas, and will reduce the stimulation to your brain.”

“What!?”

“If you desire more knowledge, you can deduce more things from one example, and raise more questions that are worthy of contemplation. If you are tired of it after such a short time,

it just proves that you are lacking in your studies.”

“Tch! You are… treating me like a fool again…”

Her voice was quivering.

Margaret who was lying elegantly on the couch all this while had a scowl of anger on her face.

She gritted her teeth.

Regis didn't back down.

“… Ostracizing those who don’t acknowledge your value… Refusing to put in the hard work and always craving for simple compliments. Bestowing an unrealistic ideal to the citizens, flaming their delusion and starting a reckless war… And the result is the death of many lives.”

“Is that so? It’s a war that would be recorded in the history books after all. It’s only natural that people will die.”

“… Recorded in history? Well, maybe a line or so.”

“Ehh?”

Margaret looked shocked.

‘… Have you studied history properly? Not recent history, but the books chronicling the founding of your nation until present times. Although High Britannia will restart the count whenever a new monarch is coronated, but we still know that it has been 300 years since the current government system has been formed. Do you know how many wars were waged during that period? Exactly 100 years ago, there was a war. You remember who the opposing nation was?”

“H-How can I remember all of that?”

“It was the Belgarian Empire.”

“…!?”

“The Belgarian Empire back then expanded its front lines, and even started a war against High Britannia beyond the ocean. In the end, they retreated with the worsening of the eastern front lines. Even though the territory didn’t increase or decrease, and the sovereignty didn’t change… It was still an important event for the people back then… However, the history books barely made any mention of this incident, and would just write a couple of lines when it is mentioned occasionally. Ah, I haven’t read too many history books on High Britannia, so I don’t know how your nation treated this

incident… Looks like Your Majesty didn’t know either?”

“A-Are you saying that this war will be treated like that in the end too?”

“If you had learned history properly, you wouldn’t even need to ask this.”

“But… How could it be… Because… I started the war!”

“For the long flow of history, this is just a common scene. Even approaching it from the military perspective, the High Britannia Kingdom still lost, so the argument that ‘this war was the key to the era of knights changing to the era of rifles’ will not be convincing. After all, the Empire won— Many leaders would think that way. In order to change archaic values, a major event with no room for debate will be needed.”

“……”

Margaret turned silent.

Oswald sighed.

“… You are really harsh.”

“You already know all this, right? Because you knew, that’s why you could manipulate Her Majesty. Is this all for your desire to make it big?”

“Not at all. I just want to serve Her Majesty.”

“… Why are you doing this? Fulfilling her misguided wish would just worsen her immature thinking, you should understand that.”

“Even the parts of her that are broken are lovely in my eyes.”

His smile remained unchanged.

Regis felt a chill on his back. When he thought of the fact that this man is the commander of a national army, his back felt even colder.

“For that to actually…”

Regis could only sigh.

Latreille stepped forward.

“I understand the reasons now. I admire your competency in military strategies… But I can’t recruit a deviant like you who leads your nation to ruin. If you will not back down, I will not

show mercy.”

He dismounted and drew his treasure sword.

The knight escorts around him were in an uproar.

“Field Marshall, leave this to us!”

“This guy is too dangerous!”

“Please let us handle this!”

Latreille went closer to Oswald.

“In the war with High Britannia, many soldiers died because of my immaturity in tactics. I can’t let good men die anymore.”

Latreille faced off against Oswald.

“That’s what you want, right?”

“Although you know that, you are still indulging me with a duel… As expected, the personalities of Belgarian royals are all very interesting.”

Regis sighed.

Even though Latreille was calm and acted maturely, he was Altina’s older brother after all, he thought.

He won’t back down from a challenge.

Oswald saw through that, that’s why he killed all those knight escorts.

— *There is still the question of how many knights he needed to kill before Latreille steps forth, but Oswald achieved this goal, so his skills are extraordinary.*

Latreille wiggled the tip of his blade.

“What’s the matter? Your wish came true… What are you waiting for?”

“Nothing, I am just very grateful. Grateful to you for granting me victory!”

“Stop dreaming!!”

Latreille was the one who charged in first.

The distance of ten paces was covered instantly.

It was similar to the night duel during the Founding Day Festival he had with Altina back in April.

The slash was just for an instant.

Oswald twisted his body. It glanced through his shoulders, but it merely cut his clothes.

He made use of the speed of Latreille to close the distance and stabbed at Latreille’s left shoulder.

“Your movements are rather dull, is your armor too heavy?”

“Cut out the nonsense!”

Even though Latreille dodged when he was about to be hit, blood still dripped from the gaps of his armor.

His arm was injured.

His left arm slumped weakly.

He probably couldn’t exert strength with it.

The armours of the knights around them clattered as they picked up their swords and lances.

However, this was a one on one duel, it was despicable to help from the side.

Oswald launched a consecutive attack

“Fu!! Hah!”

“Hmmp…!?”

Most of the attacks slid off the armor, but the others that stabbed into the gaps of the armor wounded Latreille’s arm and flank.

The escorts became rowdy.

“S-Strong!”

“What speed…”

“Can the Field Marshall take him!?”

Latreille glared at his opponent.

“No killing intent at all. Are you trying to take me prisoner!?”

“Fufu… in order to save the glorious Queen Margaret, I need a hostage of equal standing.”

“Hmmp, how is that equal! You dare compare me to the Queen of a small nation like High Britannia!?”

“In that case, I will ask for a higher ransom when I release you.”

Oswald increased the speed of his attacks.

Even though Latreille also swung his sword, he couldn’t hit from this distance and missed.

He had the disadvantage of his left arm being immobile, so Latreille was being attacked one sidedly. The situation was dire.

“Guah!?”

“Fufufu… I see, I see. I felt your rash approach earlier was strange… so that’s why.”

Latreille seemed to turn stiff.

Oswald smiled.

“Your eyes are losing their light.”

“Ughh…”

Latreille pursed his lips tightly.

The guards were in a commotion.

But Regis wasn't surprised. He had considered this possibility after much thought.

When he saw Latreille moving as if his eyes were fine, Regis thought he had recovered. But when he fought an opponent on the same level as him, the effect would show.

— *As expected, Prince Latreille has trouble with his eyes.*

Oswald was laughing so hard that his shoulders were trembling.

“Fufu… in this dim light, you can’t see my sword anymore right?’

“Shut up.”

“Ha, hahahaha… I thought so! I thought so! This is proof that Queen Margaret who is loved by the gods is a special existence! In such a desperate situation, such a miraculous stroke of luck arrived! This proves that only someone as great as Her Majesty is chosen by the gods!”

“… So long winded”

“Thank you for your compliment! Wonderful… Just wonderful! Ohh, I am so moved that my whole body is shaking. A miracle! This is a miracle! The shining Queen Margaret is a peerless existence! The only one in this world!!”

Latreille braced his sword and thrust forth.

“Fool! I just have slight difficulty in seeing things, my victory remains unshakable!”

“There is no way you can win if you can’t see.”

Oswald’s sword pressed close to Latreille’s chest—

The direction of the thrust changed suddenly.

With a speed that Regis’ eyes couldn’t keep up with.

Fortunately, Latreille should be able to see that. But he didn’t dodge.

His right thigh was pierced.

“… It’s over.”

“That’s why I say you are a fool!”

The left arm that was slumped all this while grabbed Oswald’s right hand suddenly.

“What!? I definitely pierced it earlier!”

“How can such a thin sword harm my body!!”

Latreille slashed his sword down.

With his wrist held, Oswald couldn’t pull away. The attack would definitely hit.

“Ughh!?”

Oswald lifted his left arm to block.

The sword cut into his left arm, and then—

The Sword of the Emperor Arme Victoire Volonte cut from Oswald’s left shoulder all the way to his chest.

Oswald screamed.

“Ahhh!? Ahhh!? Arggghhhhhhhh——!!”

Blood gushed from his wounds.

Oswald collapsed.

He wouldn’t be able to lift a sword with that hand anymore.

And his sword was left stabbed into Latreille’s leg. Latreille’s agile movement almost made others forget about his wounds. At the very least, his left arm and right leg are severely injured.

There was no doubt his injuries were serious, but Latreille remained standing nonchalantly.

He thrust his bloodied sword into the air.

“We are victorious!”

Wahhh, the escorts crowded around Latreille.

“Vive l’Empire!”

“I-Instead of that, these wounds!”

“Bring the Field Marshall back to base, hurry!”

“He can’t ride a horse with these wounds, get a doctor!”

“What are you saying!? It took two hours for us to get here!?”

They argued ceaselessly.

The unit lacked direction because Latreille was heavily injured, and the guard commander was killed by Oswald.

Regis pointed.

“… Use that carriage then.”

The guards looked in the direction Regis was pointing.

Right before them was Margaret’s carriage.

The murderous guards approached with their swords in hand.

“Oh, that’s right! Let’s use this carriage!”

“What about that woman?”

“Kill… No, our orders are to… Hmm?”

Ah! They gasped in surprise.

“S-Sir Strategist!”

When he heard their panicked yell, Regis ran over.

Blood was dripping from the black couch on the carriage.

Margaret’s lips raised slightly.

On the left of her slender waist— at her flank was the hilt of a knife. It was a fruit knife.

“Fu, fufufu… I… Won’t become a prisoner. Because I am not afraid to die. I won’t bow down to you.”

“What…!?”

“Aha… Haha… Surprised?”

Her face was paler than paper.

Rage filled Regis’ belly. He noticed that it had been a while since he got angry.

‘You idiot!”

‘Eh!?”

“T… To think that you are this retarded. You have the obligation to take responsibility for this war. Even if you want

to die, you will need permission from Belgaria. To think that you are about to turn your death into something meaningless so hastily!”

“... I don’t care about all that... I will live if I want, and die whenever I want.”

“Regrettably, I will definitely make you live!”

The knight escorts were helpless. In the end, all they know is how to kill.

“W-What should we do? Sir Strategist...?”

“Lay the unit banner on the ground and move the Queen there! Take off her clothes and expose the wound. Looks like the knife is stabbed into the side of her abdomen. And bring all the water here!”

“Yes Sir!”

The knights carried Margaret out from the carriage.

She glared at him.

“T-This hurts... Such pain... I, will... definitely die...”

“If you are still so energetic, you will definitely be saved. I have seen countless dead people. But with the proper treatment, you will definitely be saved.”

“Fufu… Adequate treatment? Ahaha… How will you do that? There are no doctors here.”

Regis rolled up the sleeves of his uniform.

“… I read some medical books in the military library once.”

Chapter 7 - Regis Assassination Plot

“Vive l’Empire! Vive le Général d'armée!”

The soldiers cheered.

When Regis returned to base, the sky there was golden.

Bonfires blazed brightly everywhere. It was so bright that it felt as if the stars in the sky had decreased in numbers.

Latreille sat in a chair in the deepest part of the headquarters after he received treatment.

“You are back, Sir Regis.”

“Field Marshall! Shouldn’t you be lying down!?”

“I already handed a lot of things to you. And lying down when the troops are singing songs of our victory is too unsightly.”

“Not at all… But your wounds are serious…”

“The wounds are sealed. It is painful, but that means there is no rot, that’s what the doctor told me.”

Germaine who was standing besides him sighed.

“He said that the pain would definitely make a normal man scream in pain too… Really now… You already surrounded him with so many troops, yet you still fought a one on one duel…”

Regis could emphasize with Germaine’s sigh. He felt the same way before when he acted as Altina’s Strategist.

Latreille crossed his arms.

“Don’t worry. There won’t be any long lasting ailments for my injury this time, I will make a full recovery. But it will take two months.”

Germaine sighed again.

“At the very least, for this period of time, please don’t push yourself”

“I understand.”

Regis recalled making a similar promise with Altina, and smiled wryly.

Latreille changed the topic.

“— Well then, Sir Regis. I didn’t see the situation personally… But I asked Germaine for the details.”

“I heard the device worked as planned. That is great.”

“The staff officers are convinced. Well, after seeing your command, there wouldn’t be anyone who would question your abilities.”

“… I am very thankful.”

Regis scratched his head embarrassingly.

“And you saved the Queen of High Britannia who attempted suicide.”

Her wound was wide and she lost a lot of blood. It was to the point that if her stomach was pressed, her organs would be squeezed out. Not just that, if her organs were forced back, it might lose blood circulation from the pressure or rupture.

To stop the wound in her stomach would require extensive medical knowledge.

“… I just happened… to have read a book and knew about it.”

Fu, Latreille smiled.

“She will become a diplomatic bargaining chip.”

“… The High Britannia Kingdom might not completely accept the ransom amount. In that case, they might give up their Queen’s life.”

“If it comes to that, we can spread the news that ‘The High Britannia Kingdom values money over the life of their monarch’, then kill their queen.”

Regis shrugged.

It was pitiful no matter who loses their life… Regis didn’t think that way.

“… Since we have to act, we have to receive a fitting remuneration.”

“Of course. Reward merit and punish violations… I will give you your reward.”

“Eh?”

“You commanded the First Army in my stead and defeated

the enemy splendidly. At the same time, your strategy saved a large number of citizens and city guards who were captured. On top of that, you rendered the fortress helpless and made them raise the white flag… Also, you acutely noticed the High Britannia Queen’s attempt to escape, and played a key role in rescuing her life. If I don’t reward someone with such merits duly, the people would question my magnanimity.”

“… I see.”

Regis was seconded as a member of the Imperial Fourth Army.

If he didn’t receive a reward that will satisfy other people, it will give rise to rumors of Regis ‘contributing without getting anything in return’.

— To be honest, Regis just wanted to return to Fort Volks as soon as possible.

As Latreille instructed, Germaine unfolded a parchment on the table.

“First, I will bestow the rank of First Grade Admin Officer to Sir Regis. Send a messenger to Inform the Military Affairs

Ministry immediately. And all official documents and exams will be waived, this letter will be the official letter of appointment.”

“Ehh!?”

“Oh, dissatisfied?’

“Uwahh… But I just took the exam for Third Grade Admin Officer…!?”

“I am considering if I should promote you to Major General.”

“Regis d’Auric accepts the assignment of First Grade Admin Officer!”

He said without thinking further.

Because it was rare to see a commoner rise to the rank of First Grade Admin Officer. Becoming a General was unheard of.

Such things would only happen occasionally, in original works or stories that were hard to understand.

Even though he was given such a position, just imagining it was enough for his knees to tremble.

Latreille nodded.

“Alright, then next. I have two documents here—”

He laid out these two parchments onto the table.

“— One of it is to accept Regis’ proposal, and designate the fortress behind here as the new front line.”

“That is great.”

“This is the papers to appoint Sir Regis as the commander of this fort. I haven’t gotten the Aristocracy Ministry’s confirmation yet… But you will be bestowed the title of Baron instead of Chevalier, and the surrounding lands would be granted to you.”

“Ah—!?”

He gasped in surprise before he could even think.

“As expected, you are not satisfied? It is a far off place after all.”

“No no, just the title of Chevalier feels like a dream to me! I just got the ‘de’ in my name! A Baron!? Isn’t that a full

fledged noble!?”

“From your battle achievements, it will be a loss for the Empire if we don’t treat you as a noble.”

“But… I don’t have any family…”

As her sister had been married off, she didn’t belong to his household.

“If it is Sir Regis, you will definitely find a spouse in the social world quickly… Then I will say something else. I am confident that this proposal would be more enticing than a fortress at the borders and a minor aristocratic title.”

“… W-What is it?”

“I would like to invite Sir Regis to become the strategist of the First Army officially. I can guarantee you the position of Chief Strategist.”

“I’m sorry, but I have to turn you down.”

Ding— the surrounding turned quiet.

He gave an answer Latreille didn’t expect without any hesitation.

Regis added:

“M-My apologies. I was expecting this… That you will recruit me after the plan succeeds. However, me and Al… and the Princess already made a promise.”

“Have you thought it though? I don’t think I have to ask this much… But I don’t understand. What I am saying means that… I will become Emperor.”

“… Yes.”

“I have some problems with my eyes, but I can still use them for now, and Germaine will assist me. After subjugating the surrounding nations, I want to make the Belgarian Empire a nation that will remain prosperous for a thousand years.”

“… Yes.”

“I have the confidence in laying down the foundations of a new governance system.”

“... That is possible.”

“From the perspective of Sir Regis, am I an idealist who set an unrealistic goal, just like the High Britannia Queen?”

“… Not at all… No matter what, this and that are different. I think Prince Latreille’s plan is plausible. Or rather, I feel that this world is heading in that direction.”

Latreille tilted his head.

‘If that is the case, why are you rejecting me and choosing Altina? Are you afraid of the people in the Fourth Army criticizing you?”

Regis shook his head.

“Because the one who can realize my dream is Her Highness.”

Latreille narrowed his eyes.

“Is that… the fairy tale like dream of making war disappear?”

“Yes.”

“How foolish. That is an impossible dream. If a deviant is born in the neighboring Kingdom, becomes the monarch and attacks, what will you do?”

“… When that time comes, we can only fight.”

“Sir Regis, you understand that is just a dream?”

“No… When a situation like the Empire being attacked happens… I wish the neighboring nations won’t attack as well to rob a burning house, but unite and help each other instead. That is the goal of the princess, and an ideal I want to bet my life on achieving.”

“Helping each other when we fall into danger?”

“Yes.”

“That’s foolish.”

“… That’s so, considering the current situation. It will definitely take a long time. It probably won’t be realized within my lifetime. However, it might become a cornerstone.”

“You think other people will inherit such a fantasy like dream?”

Latreille sounded very stern.

But Regis just smiled.

“… Even if there isn’t anyone, it will be left on the books.”

Silence fell once again.

They could hear the victory songs outside. It were songs praising the Empire and Latreille.

From time to time, they could hear Regis' name being shouted. Seemed like the soldiers understood the meaning behind the work they did.

Latreille had a troubled expression on his face.

Even though he could smile despite the pain that normal people wouldn't be able to bear, he was still sweating after knowing Regis has made up his mind.

"Is there no room… for reconsideration?"

"I am very sorry."

"... If you want to realize Argentina's ideal, that would mean taking my position. Because her ideal and my goal of subjugating the surrounding nations are incompatible."

"That is the truth… To be honest, compared to building cordial relations with the neighboring countries, fighting a political battle with Prince Latreille would be much harder."

“I will become Emperor. Once I take the throne, Argentina will lose her succession rights.”

“… Yes.”

“Isn’t that dream over. Why are you so adamant about it?”

“… Yes… I am sorry. The discussion after this seemed unrelated to the liberation of Grebauvar.”

Regis only accepted his promotions papers, then bowed deeply.

“… I have learned many things in this campaign. I am very grateful for the help you gave me during the promotion exams.”

Latreille closed his eyes.

Then sighed deeply.

“I… have seized many things… But the person I am after thought nothing about them.”

“Eh?”

“Nothing, it’s just my own problem…”

“Prince Latreille, I will be taking my leave.”

“…… Yes, farewell. Sir Regis, you are the best strategist.”

His expression was very peaceful.

And the eyes of Germaine who stood besides him were as cold as ice.

Regis walked towards his own tent.

He could hear the sound of the soldiers celebrating. It might continue until morning.

In front of the tent—

A black haired lady was standing there, illuminated by the bonfire.

“Ah, Ms Fanrine.”

“Sir Regis!”

She ran over.

— *Hmm? Did something happen?*

He was just thinking that when she ran before him — but she didn’t stop.

Fuwa, he felt a warm sensation.

He was embraced tightly.

“Ah wah…!?”

“I’m so glad that you are safe!”

“E-Erm… I… the blood…”

“Are you hurt!?”

“No, I’m fine. This is the High Britannia Queen’s blood. It got on my sleeve, so it’s a bit…”

“Hya! You actually killed the enemy commander!?”

“No no, or rather, it was to save her… Ah, speaking of which do you have something for me even though it is so late?”

Fanrine widened her eyes.

And she showed a lonely expression.

“… I have been waiting here all this time, praying for Sir Regis’ safe return.”

“Ehh!?”

“… Because, I heard you chased after the escaping enemy general with just a handful of troops with you.”

“Ah, well, yeah.”

It wasn’t wrong, but not exactly right either.

In the first place, the one who led the troops in pursuit was Latreille. Regis was just one of the soldiers with him.

And the King of Langobalt would be more fitting for the title of enemy commander. He surrendered after the water attack, and didn’t even need a standoff.

As he was thinking about various things—

Fanrine hugged him tighter.

“I… am a little… afraid. Thinking what I should do if I lose Sir Regis.”

“I was just issuing orders in the headquarters. Even though we killed a lot of people and lost a lot of men, I wasn’t in immediate danger.”

“No matter where you are, this is a war zone. There are no places that are absolutely safe.”

“Ahh, yes… you are right.”

‘And so, for you to return safely… And to hear your voice once again… I am very glad… Ah.”

Fanrine let go of him.

Her entire face turned red.

“I, I am really shameless! M-My deep apologies, Sir Regis!”

“… Not at all.”

“You returned so tired after so much hardship, but I… It must fill you with displeasure.”

“No, not at all. Things like feeling unpleasant… Or rather, it made my mood very pleasant.”

— *Just what am I saying?*

“Hah…”

Fanrine turned even more embarrassed, even her ears were red.

The soldiers standing sentry some distance away looked this way as they were a bit too loud.

The two of them were basking under their curious gaze.

Fanrine was a daughter of a Duke House. And she was unmarried. No, there would be a different kind of problem if she was married.

No matter what, it would be troubling for her if weird rumors spread.

“Well, let’s not stand around here and chat idly. I am fine… Erm… Thank you for your concern.”

“… Yes… Yes. It’s fine if it is pleasant for you.”

“T-T-That’s right.”

Regis’ cheeks were heating up too.

They entered the tent as if they were running away.

“E-Erm…”

“Hmm?”

“Is Sir Regis going to turn in already? W-Well… would you like to eat something… I prepared some brioche… But, it is too late now right?”

I see, so she is waiting for that reason too.

If Regis asked, a soldier would bring him some food, but he didn’t want to chew on meat jerky right now, as he was about to sleep.

But brioche would be another matter.

It was a luxurious item for commoners after all. And having to eat it on the battlefield was just like a dream.

“Please do! Ah… But… It might be a little dangerous.”

“What happened?”

“… A small matter happened… with Prince Latreille.”

Regis sighed.

Fanrine narrowed her eyes slightly.

“Is that so. If you are not going to sleep right away, maybe it will be better if you tell me about what will happen in the future.”

Fanrine’s tone was very calm, as if she was asking Regis if he would like some tea to go with his brioche.

Regis was hesitant about dragging her into this— But on second thought, if something happened to him, it was unlikely for Fanrine to be safe too.

“… It will be nice to discuss this with you.”

“That’s great. It’s a bit cold, but we have tea here.”

“Wonderful. My stomach is empty right now, but I don’t feel like eating meat. I am really glad that I could eat these.”

“Ufufu, that’s wonderful.”

Fanrine was all smiles.

Inside the tent—

Regis sat on the chair that came with his work desk. Fanrine sat on the edge of the bed that was a little soft.

He briefly told her how the battle went for the day, and the content of his conversation with Latreille.

She listened carefully as she nodded.

Regis started eating his brioche.

“And so, it might become dangerous — Wah, this is delicious!”

“I am glad that it is to your liking.”

“This is the most delicious butter roll I have ever had! Is this really made in the war zone? Amazing!”

“This is made from butter and eggs that were sent over here just this morning. The ingredients aren’t too different from the ones used in local bakeries.”

“I see. That might be so, it is still amazing made from temporary stoves.”

“Hufufu… If Sir Regis likes it, I will make them for you every morning.”

“That will make me really happy.”

“Haha… me too…”

Fanrine lowered her blushing face.

Regis returned to the topic as he ate the butter roll:

“… Well then… I should rephrase it as ‘we need to think about how to handle this before returning to the capital’. But from the expression of Prince Latreille, there is no telling that I can make it through this night safely.”

“But there are a lot of people here. And Sir Regis is the one who achieved the most merits.”

“… Shouldn’t that be Lord Batteren of the White Hare Knights?’

“Judging from what Sir Regis said, even though that lord achieved a lot of merits, but he still didn’t subjugate the enemy commander. The tactic that forced the King of Langobalt to surrender and the prevented escape of the High Britannia Queen are all thanks to Sir Regis’ contribution.”

“Hmm… The flooding only succeeded thanks to the pioneers, and Queen Margaret was captured because the Field Marshall won his duel… However, even though I am not the biggest contributor, my merits couldn't be ignored.”

“That’s right.”

“I am seconded from the Fourth Army after all. If anything happens, Prince Latreille’s reputation would fall drastically.”

“I think so too.”

“And so, I don’t think he will go that far for someone like me — That’s how I thought until just now.”

“Sir Regis, that would be too careless.”

Fanrine stated firmly.

Not only did she have cooking skills that could rival professionals, she was also familiar with topics on politics and military. She was much more competent than those bureaucrats.

She didn’t get her post as a General Affairs Officer in the Military Affairs Ministry out of the willfulness of her

aristocratic status alone.

Regis nodded.

“… Even I… have learned a lot of things, yes. Thinking from Prince Latreille’s perspective, he has to eliminate me even if he is denounced as a coward, which is plausible… Although being so conceited made me a little embarrassed. I shouldn’t have said it after all. Don’t you think so?”

He lowered his voice gradually.

Fanrine clenched her small fists.

“Please be strong, Sir Regis. You are the pillar of the Fourth Princess Camp.”

“P-Putting it that way…”

“From the Second Prince’s point of view, only Sir Regis’ wisdom can affect the advantage he is holding.”

“Well… Although I had done all I can to destabilize his position…”

“Or rather, the thinking that the Second Prince will let you go so easily after witnessing you using these tactics is too naive.

I think that is sweeter than butter cakes.”

<TL: 甘い has the double entre of being sweet and naive.>

Regis chewed on his sweet brioche.

“… That is true, his reputation would just become worse. It is meaningful if it could stop his political enemy in their track.”

“Correct. Instead of being on guard… We should take action!”

“… Yes, you may be right.”

Regis stood up.

And sighed.

“Speaking of which, he is too hasty… Prince Latreille… he’s seeking results in such a short period of time because he feels uneasy about his eyes?’

He remembered what Latreille said when the new rifle was shown to Regis.

“*I plan to use this, and subjugate the surrounding nations within two years.*”

Fanrine nodded.

“That might be so. No matter how ferocious the enemy may be, there is no reason for us to give in meekly.”

“… I agree.”

“Sir Regis, please make adequate preparations to protect yourself.”

“… I understand… But it is a bit troubling.”

“What’s the matter?”

“It would be best to prepare things like tactics far ahead of time. If I only think about it when there is danger, I won’t be able to come up with a plan just like that.”

To be honest, he didn’t have any idea on how to break open the situation.

Fanrine slumped her shoulders disappointedly.

“Y-You have really never thought that you yourself would be targeted?”

“What should we do?”

Regis scratched his head.

It was probably because of fatigue, his thoughts seemed to be covered with a layer of fog.

If he was reading, his eyes would glance at the top of the words— That sort of feeling. He couldn’t come up with a specific plan immediately.

Fanrine stood up.

“…Hmm!?”

And showed an even more serious face.

Regis tilted his head.

“What is the matter?”

“… The laughter of the soldiers is gone.”

“… That’s true… Have they gone to bed?”

That was a joke of course.

Even Regis wasn’t that optimistic.

He could hear the footsteps of several people drawing near. The clinking sound of their armour could also be heard.

“Oh no… Ms Fanrine, please hide under the bed.”

“Even if this is an order from Sir Regis, please allow me to refuse. I have already decided to live and die alongside the person who made a promise with me to be together in the future.”

‘Ehh? Future?’

“The promise to make breakfast for Sir Regis every day.”

“… Wait!?”

The drapes hanging at the entrance of the tent were torn open.

Regrettably, the structure of the tent wasn’t as sturdy as a normal house.

It was not strong enough to stop attacks.

Regis raised his hands.

“… I hope there will be grounds for negotiation.”

If it was just him alone, he wouldn’t give in to any threats, even if he got cut down.

But Fanrine was here too.

No matter what, he had to make sure she leaves safely.

However, contrary to his expectations — the ones who tore off the drapes and entered weren’t Imperial soldiers.

“They are here!”

It was in Germanian.

But he couldn’t tell which nation they were from by looking at their armour.

“Eh? Mercenaries?”

“Hey? Is this the guy?”

‘Yeah… Found him, good work. Please wait here for a moment, stay alert of your surroundings.”

“Got it. But just three minutes.”

“I won’t make you wait too long.”

Six mercenaries entered the tent. All of them had the aura of veterans who braved countless battlefields.

And after that, two women stood behind them.

“Ehh!?”

Regis blurted out unconsciously.

Even though their attire was different, they were definitely Jess and Franca.

Fanrine’s expression turned stern.

“W-What are you doing!?”

In place of a reply, Franca aimed her mini crossbow at her.

“Sis, can I kill this woman?”

Regis stood up hurriedly in front of Fanrine as if he was shielding her.

“W-Wait! I-I remember now… You are Franziska of the Mercenary band, ‘Renard Pendu’ right!?”

“Bingo~. You only noticed now?”

“… I didn’t notice at all. Why did you disguise yourself as my maid?”

“Don’t talk about it! I will pull the trigger if you piss me off!”

“That would be really troubling.”

The one who answered Regis was the woman standing beside Franziska. She was Jess — which was obviously an alias.

“Good evening, Master Auric… I will introduce myself again. I am Jessica Schweinzeberg, Gilbert’s younger sister.”

Regis nodded.

“… I see, that’s how it is… You are the ones who raised the smoke signal, and recalled your companions of ‘Renard Pendu’ back from the High Britannia army.”

“As expected of you, you understood immediately.”

“… Am I your target?”

“That’s right. You realized too late. It is already too late…”

Franziska aimed her crossbow.

“Being cut by a blade really hurts okay? And Sis, can I kill this woman? She glared and lectured me that time.”

“Guu…”

Fanrine’s shoulders were trembling.

Regis’ sleepiness had been blown away. His heart was racing right now, and he was breaking out in sweat.

He quickly browsed through the bookshelves in his mind.

However, stories with such situations… Ah…

The candle light flickered.

The shadows cast by the orange light were wavering.

A man leaned back fully on his chair.

“… As I thought… I have to kill him.”

The one who was whispering like a beast was Latreille.

Germaine nodded.

“It is regrettable, but Sir Regis is too dangerous.”

“… I need more strength… In order for the Belgarian Empire to last forever… To achieve this, I really wanted to obtain his wisdom.”

“You can’t. Even if you need fire, you can’t welcome a forest fire. That uncontrollable powerful force isn’t really a shortcut to reach your goal.”

“… Perhaps you are right.”

“It’s the same for the battle this time — We liberated the captured Grebauvar citizens, caught the Langobalt King and High Britannia’s Queen, and chased the enemy out of Imperial territory. These are great results, but in the end, the base at the frontline got flooded and it would be hard for it to function as it had in the past.”

“Yes…”

“The Imperial front lines had to be retreated to the mountain top. This matches the policy of the Fourth Princess perfectly.”

“… We wanted to use him, but got used by him in the end…

He even planned to this extent.”

“Even without his magic-like command, if we have enough new rifles and cannons, we can make Belgaria great again, and return it to its former glory… No, we will have a military strength that is much more overwhelming than before.”

“Yes, our army can win even without him.”

“Or rather, we should eliminate elements of uncertainty.”

“… You are right.”

Latreille picked up the two papyrus left on the table.

He crushed them.

Then tore them to shreds.

And issued an order just like a beast extending its claws.

“Kill… Regis d’Auric.”

End of Volume 10

Appendices

fabrication de l'acier 2

Digging up iron ore from mines and refining them into iron was known as smelting.

It was explained previously that the fuel used in smelting, coke, was obtained by the destructive distillation of coal.

Destructive distillation was done by cutting off air supply and heating it up. Under normal circumstances, heating up coal would just make it burn, but doing so without oxygen would just distill the impurities. In other words, this was thermal decomposition. And the device used for destructive distillation was called a coke furnace.

It was harder to burn coke, compared to coal. In order to burn them, the temperature of the furnace needed to be increased. The furnace’s heat came from burning, also known as combustion, the more oxygen there was, the higher the temperature.

In order to send air into the furnace forcefully, manpower and watermill could no longer suffice. And so, steam generators were starting to be incorporated.

By the way, steam generators were invented in the beginning to expel water from coal mines. Boilers that could withstand high steam pressure couldn’t be forged in the beginning, so a lot of the excavated coal was used on the steam generator itself, making it very inefficient.

By civilization was developed by the meshing of countless factors. The used of the steam generator increased the temperature inside the furnace, and large quantity of high grade iron was produced. Boilers that could withstand higher steam pressure was forged from them, and a more efficient steam generator was developed.

With the appearance of high temperature furnace, large quantity of molten iron could be produced, and the lives of the people started changing drastically. Steel farm tools cleared the forest, and farming efficiency improved, increasing the human population by leaps and bounds.

However, there was still some problems with steel made from blast furnace… (To be continued next volume)

Fusée

When relaying orders to units far away from the battlefield, and notifying the capital of abnormal situation at the national borders during times of peace, speed was of the essence.

The most reliable means were fast horses. They could send information accurately.

However, if the content of the information was simple, simpler methods like pigeons and alarm bells could be used.

On the battlefield, things like bugles could be used.

Signals sent via smoke were called ‘wolf smoke’ in Japanese because the technology was explained as ‘burning the feces of wolves would make the smoke rise up straight’ when it spread from China.

In France, ‘Fusée’ meant smoke signal. It has nothing to do with wolves in europe.

Fusée rises straight up because when the air was heated by

flames, it will rise.

A smoke signal structure was build by making a wooden frame, filling it with hay and then burning it.

By throwing in leaves and gunpowder into the fire, the smoke could be dyed a different colour.

As depicted in the illustration, smoke signal structure used in the battlefield just needed to be simple in design.

If it needed to be ready for use for long periods of time, in places like the watch towers at the borders, the design of the smoke signal structure would be more complicated.

In order for it to be usable during rain, roof and chimney would be built. It would have a special design so its flames could be seen in the direction of their allies even at night.

By using a series of fusée, even if the distance required several days of marching, it could be relayed in a few hours.

The invention of the telegraph happened after the development of the railway. And before that, fusée was the

fastest mean of relaying information out of all the methods of men.

勇者の証明 ロティーナ文
読んで(ださって)ありがとうございます!
今回も番のないロティーナさん
次は活躍できると良いですね…
なめてもう10巻目ということに
びっくりしています。
むらさきさん、担当の和田さん
今回も大変楽しませて
いただきました。
ありがとうございます。

Credits

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